

**GENDERED MIGRATION, GENDERED AFFILIATIONS:  
A CASE OF WOMEN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS FROM CENTRAL ASIA  
IN THE *HIZMET* MOVEMENT IN TURKEY**

by

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **GENDERED MIGRATION, GENDERED AFFILIATIONS: A CASE OF WOMEN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS FROM CENTRAL ASIA IN THE *HIZMET* MOVEMENT IN TURKEY**

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Keywords: Gender, the Hizmet community, migration, Central Asia, women university students

This thesis focuses on the experiences of migration, education and affiliation of the women university students from Central Asia in the *Hizmet* community in Turkey. Based on semi-structured, in-depth interviews, personal experience and participant-observation with the women students from Central Asia within the *Hizmet* housings in Turkey, this research explores how women students from Central Asia become affiliates of the transnational *Hizmet* community and how this affiliation shapes their experience of gender, education, migration, and belonging. How do young women from Central Asia become part of the *Hizmet* community and how do they experience and articulate their affiliation with the movement? How do the migration to Turkey and their involvement in the community affect their lives? How do they define and describe being a woman affiliate of the community? Asking these questions and others, this thesis aims to conduct a critical gender analysis of the experiences of women students from Central Asia and to fill this gap in the literature on the Gülen community.

The ethnographic data of this research reveals the gendered daily practices of socialization and the role of family concepts in the migration path. The thesis aims to contribute to the existing literature on gender and the *Hizmet* community as well as to the literature on mobilization of women in religious and political movements in Turkey.

## ÖZET

### CİNSİYETLENDİRİLMİŞ GÖÇ, CİNSİYETLENDİRİLMİŞ İLİŞKİLER: TÜRKİYE’DE *HİZMET* HAREKETİ’NDE ORTA ASYA’LI KADIN ÜNİVERSİTE ÖĞRENCİLERİ

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Anahtar sözcükler: Toplumsal cinsiyet, Hizmet hareketi, göç, Orta Asya, kadın  
üniversite öğrencileri

Bu tez, Türkiye’deki *Hizmet* Hareketi’nde kalan Orta Asya’lı kadın üniversite öğrencilerinin göç, eğitim ve ilişkilendirme deneyimlerine odaklanmaktadır. Çalışma, yarı-yapılandırılmış, derinlemesine mülakat, kişisel deneyim ve katılımcı gözlem tekniğine dayanarak Orta Asya’lı kadın öğrencilerin nasıl uluslararası *Hizmet* hareketine dahil olduklarını ve bu ilişkilendirmenin cinsiyetlendirilmiş göç, eğitim ve aidiyet tecrübelerini nasıl şekillendirdiğini incelemektedir. Bu genç kadınlar nasıl *Hizmet* hareketinin bir parçası oluyorlar? *Hizmet* hareketine katılımını nasıl deneyimliyor ve nasıl anlatıyorlar? Türkiye’ye göç etmeleri ve Harekete katılımları hayatlarını nasıl etkiliyor? Harekette kadın katılımcı olmayı nasıl tanımlıyorlar ve anlatıyorlar? Bu sorular çerçevesinde, bu tez Orta Asya’lı kadın öğrencilerinin deneyimlerinin eleştirel toplumsal cinsiyet incelemesini yapmayı ve Gülen hareketi üzerine yazılan literatüre katkıda bulunmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Bu etnografik araştırma sosyalleşmenin cinsiyetlendirilmiş günlük pratiklerini ve göç için kullanılan aile kavramlarının rolünü inceler. Bu tez hem Gülen hareketi ve toplumsal cinsiyet konulu literatüre hem dini ve siyasi hareketlerde kadınların katılımını inceleyen araştırmalara katkıda bulunmayı hedeflemektedir.

*To my family*

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“Are you an ex-affiliate of Cemaat? We were expecting a man?” These were the first words of the university students who approached me at the event that aimed to bring people from different social groups and backgrounds to communicate with and get to know each other. The sights of surprise on the faces of these students prompted me to think not only about my affiliation with the *Hizmet* community<sup>1</sup> as a woman and a university student from Central Asia but also about the perception of the movement as a male-dominated and male-oriented domain. This thesis derives from the aspiration to understand and discuss my experience and the experience of other women affiliates in the movement.

In the course of my research, I always felt the need to revisit my positioning in the field as well as my involvement with the *Hizmet* community<sup>2</sup>. Based on semi-structured, in-depth interviews, personal experience and participant-observation, this research explores how women students from Central Asia become affiliates of the transnational *Hizmet* community and how this affiliation shapes their experience of gender, education, migration, and belonging. How do young women from Central Asia become part of the *Hizmet* community and how do they experience and articulate their affiliation with the movement? How do the migration to Turkey and their involvement in the community affect their lives? How do they define and describe being a woman affiliate of the community?

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<sup>1</sup> The movement is referred as the Gülen movement in the academic literature and as the *Hizmet* movement or *Müşpet Hareketi* (Constructive Movement) among the followers. I will use both Gülen community and *Hizmet* movement in my thesis.

<sup>2</sup> This notion will be discussed in detail in coming parts.

Asking these questions and others, this thesis aims to conduct a critical gender analysis of the experiences of women students from Central Asia and to fill this gap in the literature on the Gülen community. My interpretation of their narratives is informed by a critical gender analysis that seeks to understand the ways in which the structures of the community and the experience of women students are gendered. I use the term “critical” to differentiate my approach from analyses that “normalize” gender differences. A critical gender analysis problematizes a naturalized understanding of gender differences and discusses the implications of such naturalization. I argue that the gendered structures of the *Hizmet* community play a significant role in the formation of female Muslim subjectivities.

In this chapter, I first introduce my personal experience as a former woman affiliate of the community while at the same time questioning my positioning in the field as a researcher and discussing my experience during fieldwork, focusing particularly on the tensions and the difficulty of access. I also narrate the starting point and the reformulation of my thesis questions and research after entering the field. In addressing these issues, I also interrogate my research methodology and data analysis. This research has been shaped by every interviewee’s narrative and would not have been possible without the personal input of every participant that triggered me to ask more elaborate and comprehensive questions. Every interviewee’s account inspired me to re-think my individual experience and re-assess my positioning in the fieldwork. After introducing my research participants, I analyze the socio-historical background of the community from a feminist perspective and situate my research in the literature on the community. In the last section, I provide the outline of the thesis, briefly discussing the structure of the following chapters.

## **1.1. Methodology**

### **1.1.1. An Ex-member or Still *Abla*?: Being an “Insider” and an “Outsider”**

Once during my participant-observation, I visited one of my friends who was my gatekeeper and witnessed her conversation with my next interviewee. While introducing me, she constantly mentioned my activities as an *abla* in the movement and put stress

on how “helpful” I was for other students. This short introduction made me think about how my participants situated me and how I positioned myself in the field. Due to my former affiliation with the movement I was perceived as *abla* by some of my participants or as a sympathizer<sup>3</sup> by other followers I met. Although, like my research participants, I had stayed in the dorms of the *Hizmet* community during part of my undergraduate studies in Turkey, at the time of my research, I had not been affiliated with the movement for a few years. In the course of my research, I tried to clarify the blurriness of my position and felt the necessity to accentuate on my identity as a researcher rather than an insider.

The similarities of my experience and the experience of each of the participants made this task more difficult and challenging for me. In time, I recognized the irrelevance of my approach to reproduce the dichotomy of insider-outsider and accept my positionality in this gray area of inside and outside. Being a former “insider” made my access much easier and gave me insight on their experiences. In the course of my research, I dealt with the notions of being insider versus outsider, participant and at the same time observer, trying both to be involved and detached from the environment I researched in.

Throughout my undergraduate and graduate studies, I have always been interested in gender issues and post-Soviet cultures and societies. My personal history enabled me to add the Gülen movement among these interests. Initially, drawing on my personal experiences of gender inequality and gender-based discrimination, I was planning to research on the women university students specifically from Turkmenistan focusing on their perceptions of gendered violations in education in Turkmenistan. However, when I realized that most of the students coming to Turkey from Turkmenistan are directly or indirectly related to the movement and stay at the movement’s student housings after their arrival, my focus shifted towards their experiences in Turkey and in the movement. Furthermore, after a few interviews with the students from Turkmenistan, I recognized the limits of country-specific analysis and broadened my sample to the women students from Central Asia. Along with my personal and academic interest in the experiences of women followers, to do ethnographic research with women students was practically

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<sup>3</sup> Basically, the Gülen movement develops informal networks and does not require formal affiliation with the movement. Because of that it is impossible to count the exact number of the affiliates.

easier due to the gender-segregated structure of the movement. It would have been much more difficult for me to find and interview male followers or to attend meetings organized by male affiliates. The same limitation is valid for male researchers as well: they can conduct the research only in male housings (Vicini 2013: 383)

During my undergraduate studies in Turkey, I was affiliated with the movement for several years and stayed in their student housing. Although I got acquainted with the movement in Turkmenistan, I realized that I became part of the Gülen community when I arrived in Turkey. From the interviews with my participants, I learned that my situation is not unique; most of the students – even the alumnus of the Turkish schools in Central Asia– were not aware of the transnational activities of the movement until they came to Turkey. During the first year of my arrival, I was appointed as a tutor and continued tutoring for the most part of my involvement. The movement played an important role in my educational life in Turkey as well as my socialization. It was not only a place where I could freely practice my religion but also a place where I met a lot of people from different cultures and became friends with a lot of women. The warm and friendly attitude of the affiliates of the movement surprised me and attracted my attention. When I became part of the movement in Turkmenistan, I felt the caring and protecting attitude of *ablas* who constituted a role model of an “ideal” person for me. Yet, after my arrival to Turkey, my interactions with the “outside” world affected my perceptions of the movement. I started questioning the structure of the movement and decided to distance myself from the movement’s activities. However, the movement’s discourse of *gönül bağı* (ties of affection) and *gönül borcu* (debt of affection/gratitude) created anxiety and confusion while I was trying to disconnect from the movement. My participants’ narratives provided me with the opportunity to reevaluate this experience and to further scrutinize it. One of the main factors that affected my decision to detach from the community was the Women’s Studies course that I took as an undergraduate at the university and that triggered me to question not only the general hierarchical organization of the movement, but gender inequality within the movement in particular.

After a preliminary literature review, I realized that the affiliates who contribute to the movement and are active agents mostly referred in numbers in the literature on the movement. Though the boundaries of the movement are constantly renegotiated, one of the main obstacles of doing ethnographic research in the Gülen movement continues to be the problem of “access”: the academic world is also considered to be an “outside”

world that has to be protected from. Although I tried to reach my participants through personal contacts and shared with them my familiarity with the movement, it was not easy to find students willing to talk. It is also very important to note that the time I started my fieldwork played a significant role in my difficulty of finding research participants. The recent major split between the movement and the ruling party in Turkey that occurred in December 2013 has caused the tightening of the boundaries of the movement. During my fieldwork I had an opportunity to have a conversation with one of the “outliers” – a woman university student from Turkey. As she stressed the tensions between the government and the movement were the reasons she left the movement. Most of my research participants did not start talking about their experience in the Gülen movement until I asked or until I started to narrate my experience as a student in the movement.

### **1.1.2. Research Methodology**

Between January and April 2014, I attended various meetings in dormitories and student houses for women students in the Gülen movement. It would be inaccurate to limit my fieldwork to three months as my previous affiliation with the movement inaugurated my interest in studying gender and women followers. However, these three months were the period when I was able to step back to analyze and observe the movement with questions arising from my studies in the social sciences.

I conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 14 women university students discussing their experiences of migration, education and affiliation with the Gülen movement. Our conversations were not limited to Turkey and the Gülen movement but also included their stories about their romantic affairs, comments and thoughts on their families, their plans about the future, and their disappointments with the education system back in their home countries. All of my interviews were one-to-one in a friendly atmosphere. My young age and background in the movement made this atmosphere less formal. I conducted my interviews in Istanbul and one of the Central Anatolian cities. I interviewed 8 women university student from Turkmenistan, 3 from Kyrgyzstan, 2 from Kazakhstan and 1 from Tajikistan. The reason for the

majority of the students being from Turkmenistan in my research is again due to the difficulty of finding research participants.

The ages of my interviewees ranged from 22 to 29 years old. Four of my interviewees graduated from the universities and started working; one of them is working in her home country and I had an opportunity to interview her when she came for the holidays to Turkey. Three of the participants were the graduates of Turkish schools in their home countries and were motivated to study in Turkey by their teachers. Four of my interviewees had their relatives (brothers or sisters) or acquaintances studying in Turkey and started their education following them. Three of the interviewees got acquainted with the movement in Turkey while residing in either private or state university dorms. Four of the students attended courses in the institutions of the movement – apart from the Turkish schools – in their home countries. Three of the participants left the movement while being university students. Only one of the interviewees is married. All of them are either graduates or students of the Faculty of Education (five of them; one of five is a graduate) International Relations (two), Accounting Programs (two; one of them is a graduate), the Engineering Faculty (a graduate), Chemistry (a graduate), Midwifery (one) and Textile (one). Four of the interviews were conducted in Russian upon the request of my interlocutors, while the rest took place in Turkish.

Along with the interviews, I used participant observation as a method to obtain detailed knowledge from the field and attempted to situate this knowledge from the field within a wider context (Clifford 1983). Due to my personal background in the movement, I was able to recognize and grasp terms and concepts informing the daily lives of the followers in the field. I attended celebrations (like Nevruz or birthday parties) organized by the followers and had an opportunity to conceptualize these gatherings from an outsider's perspective. Besides these gatherings, I also tried to spend time with my interviewees outside the student houses or stayed in their housings overnight. The gatherings helped me to conceptualize and discuss the effects of being affiliated with the community for these young women from Central Asia. Participant-observation helped me to explore the *abla* system and integrate it into the discussion of adaptation and perception of Turkey as well as the construction of fictive kinship ties.

My knowledge of the Turkish and Central Asian contexts and my former experience in the community enabled me to achieve diversity that I had planned from the very beginning of my work. I started all of my interviews by explaining the principles of confidentiality and ethics. In the thesis, I have changed all the names to pseudonyms . Most of the personal information about my interviewees has been modified or omitted so as not to reveal their identities. I transcribed the interviews that were digitally recorded with the permission of my research participants. The interviews lasted from one to two-and-half hours. Though each interview began with the same set of open-ended questions, my participants' stories shaped the conversation and different questions emerged in the course of our interviews. I did not follow questions strictly as they were prepared on the list but tried to add new ones and cross out the ones that seemed irrelevant to the research participant I was interacting with. Revising the questions from time to time and note-taking during the interviews contributed to a dynamic reformulation of the framework of my research.

Identifying my research participants just as affiliates of the movement or as Muslim women would be very simplistic and inadequate as it would ignore the multiple and fluid identities and practices within the movement and outside. To avoid such oversimplification, it is important to explore some other facets such as class, ethnicity, religious identity and in some cases, family's practice of religion. I provide background information on education, family, affiliation with the movement and current occupation of my participants in the following sections, after introducing the community and providing an overview of its sociohistorical background.

## **1.2. Background of the *Hizmet* Movement**

The Gülen community that mainly identifies itself as *Hizmet Hareketi*<sup>4</sup> or *Müşpet Hareketi*<sup>5</sup> is one of the widely recognized Islamic groups in Turkey and internationally.

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<sup>4</sup> *Hizmet* means service and by defining itself as a movement of service, the movement implies three kinds of service: first, it is a service to Allah, second is a service to humanity, and third is a service to nation, Turkish nation. The followers and the sympathizers of the movement refuse to call it the Gülen movement, as the calling of the leader by name is considered to be rude , and oppose labels such as *Fethullahçılar* or *Gülenciler*.



Scholars writing on the *Hizmet* movement underline the attempt of the community to define and legitimize itself as a civil society (Turam 2007) or as a social network (Özdalga 2005); rather than a *tarikât* or Sufi fraternity, hence distinguishing itself from other religious communities. Whether it is a successor of a *Nurculuk* movement led by Bediüzzaman Said Nursi or an extension of this movement is debatable. However, it can be argued that Nursi was one of the influential figures who shaped Gülen's thoughts on Islamic revivalism. Still accentuating on the revitalization of faith, the current leader of the movement, Fethullah Gülen who has been residing in the USA since 1999, appropriates a modernist discourse. Different from other Islamic movements and other *Nur* groups, the *Hizmet* movement constantly negotiates and engages with the official nationalist discourse and with the "secular" state, while at the same time expanding its activities internationally (Turam 2007; Yavuz 2003). Since the early 1990s, the movement has extended its networks across Turkey and globally (to more than 130 countries) mostly through its educational institutions. The decentralized organization, informal membership and lack of transparency of the community makes it impossible to provide the exact number of the followers and sympathizers of the movement (Turam 2007, Yavuz 2003, Özipek 2009, Agai 2002).

The *Hizmet* movement has been evolving throughout its history that dates back to the 1960s. Researchers distinguish three crucial periods in the formation and enhancement of the movement in the context of Turkey: 1) religioconservative community-building period (1970-1983); 2) loosening of the boundaries of the religious community and transition to a religio-education movement (1983-1997); 3) 28 February 1997 period (Military Ultimatum)<sup>6</sup> (Yavuz 2003, Tittensor 2012, Karatop 2011). Ruşen Çakır argues that the movement has changed dramatically since the 1990s; at that time

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<sup>5</sup> *Müşpet* means positive or constructive.

<sup>6</sup> In the first period, a core group of motivated students who attended Gülen's sermons, organized summer camps and opened the first *dershanes* and *ışık evleri* (lighthouses). The second period marks the transition from the strict religiosity to a more market-friendly religioeducation movement and the decentralization of the movement as it started to enroot its educational institutions outside Turkey. The third period reveals the contradictory ideas of Gülen supporting the military crackdown against Refah Party and remaining silent on the oppression of other Sunni Islamic groups in the country. For a detailed analysis see: Yavuz, H. 2003. *The Gülen Movement: The Turkish Puritans*. Turkish Islam and the Secular State (eds. M. Hakan Yavuz & John L. Esposito) Syracuse University Press. (19-47)

the movement's presence seemed to be limited to the magazine *Sızıntı* and some low-profile foundations (2014: 18). Gülen himself was not known except for a few videocassettes of his sermons (ibid.) However, it should be noted that the recent split between the ruling party (Justice and Development Party) in Turkey and the movement, that were in informal coalition for a decade, can be analyzed as a new period in the history of the movement. A brief overview of the events that shape this split will shed light on the context in which I conducted my ethnographic research.

In November 2013, the Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced the government's plans to close down preparatory courses for university entrance examination – *dersanes*. This event can be marked as a breaking point in the alliance of the current government and the movement. About 40 percent of the 4,000 *dersanes* in Turkey are established by the movement and constitute a considerable source of income and recruitment for the movement. Following this event, 51 suspects, including the sons of three Cabinet Ministers, were detained in “dawn operations” on December 17, 2013. While the pro-JDP facet accused the movement for setting up a “parallel state” within the judiciary and the police force, the pro-movement camp blamed the government for corruption. On the other hand, these events and operations are not the starting point of the split between the movement and JDP. There are variety of opinions on the points of the divergence between the JDP and the movement<sup>7</sup>.

For the purposes of my research, I will not go into more details about the split and the controversies in the alliance of the movement and the ruling party, but rather discuss its background and implications. In agreement with Çakır that the movement's visibility in the international arena increased in the last five years, I also suggest that the heightened tension between the movement and the JDP increased the visibility of the movement even more in Turkey and globally. The scope of this visibility should also be questioned. Who became visible and how? And more importantly, who is left out in this framework? I will return to these questions later in discussions of the existing scholarly literature in this chapter and in the following chapters of my thesis. In short, together

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<sup>7</sup> Çakır argues that the alliance was behind not only the success of the court cases known as “Ergenekon” and “Balyoz” but also their controversial aspects (2014: 18). Kurdish question and the attack of Israeli troops on flottila led by Turkish aid agency are also claimed to be among the points of controversy between the government and the movement.

with shaking the image of the movement as a civil society organization that promotes and aims at interreligious and intercultural dialogue, the tensions between the movement and the JDP crossed the boundaries of Turkey. After the Prime Minister Erdoğan made statements like : “This organization has to be exposed. Responsibility for it is on the shoulders of every one of our ambassadors”<sup>8</sup> in January 2014, the t the movement’s international activities came under further scrutiny. Bayram Balci, who extensively writes on the activities and positioning of the movement in Central Asia and the Caucasus, argues that the divorce of the alliance might put the movement’s activities and even its presence in the region and in other countries at risk (Balci 2014). I find these macro-political changes significant for my research as I conducted the ethnographic research with the subjects of the movement from Central Asian countries studying in Turkey in the context of this rapidly shifting ground. In the following subsection, I would like to briefly discuss the transnational activism of the movement with the specific focus on the Turkish schools in Central Asia.

### **1.2.1. Transnationalizing the Movement: Turkish Schools in Central Asia**

The transnationalisation of the *Hizmet* movement sets it apart from other religious movements in Turkey, as well as internationally (Balci 2014; Pandya 2012). Recruiting and including the host society into the community has been one of the main purposes of the movement’s followers migrating to different countries. It must be remembered that the success of the movement within Turkey and globally has been accomplished via educational institutions. The movement invests the significant part of its human and financial resources into the establishment of educational facilities: schools, preparatory courses, universities and dormitories. Turkish schools has become famous all over the world and become more visible in Turkey due to the International Turkish Language Olympiads<sup>9</sup> organized annually in Turkey since 2003. The schools were called “Barış

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<sup>8</sup> In his visit to Baku, the Prime Minister Erdoğan targeted the movement’s schools abroad in his speech. The news was retrieved from: <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2014/04/international-schools-abroad-suffer-gulen-conflict.html###ixzz3829zukdw>

<sup>9</sup> The International Turkish Language Olympiads is a big and significant event not only for the Turkish schools abroad but also for the movement’s institutions in Turkey. At the first stage, the students (who can speak Turkish) mainly from the Turkish schools

Köprüleri” – “The Bridges of Peace” (Ateş, Karakaş & Ortaylı 2005) by the scholars affiliated with the movement. Balci states that the reason for the schools being famous and favored by the wider audience in Turkey, beyond the affiliates of the movement, is that the movement succeeded to “tap into a sense of Turkish nationalism” by promoting Turkish language and “culture” globally (2014: 3).

On the other side, the movement succeeded in “adapting” to almost every country. The movement has paid significant importance to the local customs and needs of the host country. In the same line, Turam asserts that the most distinguishing feature of the *Hizmet* movement is not the interfaith dialogue that it advocates for but rather the engagement relationship of the movement with the state in different national contexts (2007). Building educational institutions and organizations and appealing to the cultures of the host society have been the reason for the welcoming attitude from the side of the host countries. Even though it is not a simple matter of success or failure, looking at the number of the educational institutions the movement established in about two decades it can be said that the *Hizmet* movement has been successful in spreading its word in most parts of the world, including Central Asia.

Since the 1990s Central Asia has been one of the first – and most important – regions for the transnational educational activism of the Gülen movement. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Fethullah Gülen motivated his disciples to enroot in Central Asia not only recalling the “common” past and “similar” cultures but also underlying the importance of economic and cultural investment for Turkey in this region for its future potentials in the global arena<sup>10</sup>.

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abroad compete in different titles such as general culture, reciting poems, singing songs, etc. in their own home countries. Afterwards, the finalists are invited to a grandiose ceremony in Turkey to participate in the contestation there. The celebrities and the authorities from the government (ministers, prime minister and the president) attended the event in the previous years in Turkey. The first Olympiad was held in 2003 with the participation of 11 countries. Last year, Turkey hosted students from 140 countries where Turkish schools are run.

<sup>10</sup>In November 1989 in his preach in Süleymaniye Fethullah Gülen urged his followers to pay special attention to Central Asia. A year later a group of 37 followers left Turkey to Azerbaijan and Georgia where the base for the primary schools were laid. (Kemal Karpat in “Barış Köprüleri: Dünyaya Açılan Türk Okulları” eds. Ateş, Karakaş, Ortaylı 2005: 62)

Now, it is our turn to return to our Homeland and pay our debts with gratitude by performing our duties. (...) Our entrepreneurs, industrialists, merchants familiar with the international trade and even tradesmen and workers as soon as they have a chance should go to Asia and invest in agriculture and industrial spheres to solve the problems related to unemployment. Currently, when our domestic market is at the saturation point, we need more new sources and new markets to enter into competition with the world. At this very moment Central Asia is a golden opportunity for us. If our investors at cleverly and use this opportunity by evaluating such dynamics as common religion, language, culture and history, we will be able to pull through economic blockade and join the number of rich countries in the world. (Gülen 2001<sup>11</sup>)

Long-term nation-building projects were launched in all of the five countries (Kazakhstan, Kırgızstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan) soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union. These projects aimed at constructing the nationalist consciousness conveying an ethnic and Islamic characteristics in the Independence years. The economic and political transformations in the region resulted in the deterioration of various systems, including the educational sphere (Silova, Johnson & Heyneman 2007).

According to Turam (2007),

[T]he secular Turkish Republic has come to be seen as an obvious candidate to fill the power vacuum in the Turkic region. In this secular corner of the Muslim world, Turkey and the Central Asian countries were expected to opt for regionalization in order to establish an unshakeable buffer zone against the Islamic threat that Afghanistan and Iran posed. (91)

Nonetheless, the Soviet secular past of these states and their economic and political ties to Russia have prevented them from completely turning their faces towards neighbouring Muslim countries (Iran, Afghanistan, Turkey). These states have

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<sup>11</sup> Günümüze gelince; şimdilerde yeniden *ata yurdumuza* giderek, vefa ve kadirşinaslık hisleri içinde vazife yapma sırası bize gelmiştir. [...] Müteşebbislerimiz, sanayicilerimiz, Batı ile entegrasyon neticesi dış dünyayı bilen tüccarlarımız, hatta esnaflarımız ve işçilerimiz, imkânları ölçüsünde mutlaka Asya'ya gitmeli ve oradaki istihdam problemini de halletme yolunda, sınaî ve ziraî yatırımlarda bulunmalıdırlar. [...] İç piyasanın doyum noktasına ulaştığı günümüzde, bizim yeni yeni mahreçlere ve dünya ile rekabete girebileceğimiz dış pazarlara her zamankinden daha çok ihtiyacımız var. İşte tam bu aşamada Orta Asya bizim için bulunmaz bir fırsattır. Şayet yatırımcımız akıllı davranıp, *aramızdaki din, dil, kültür, tarih birliği* (my italics) gibi dinamikleri de değerlendirerek bu fırsatı kullanabilirse, içinde bulunduğumuz ekonomik çıkmazdan kurtulmamız ve dünyanın sayılı zengin devletleri arasına girmemiz işten bile değil... Retrieved from: <http://tr.fgulen.com/content/view/11666/3/>. Gülen, M. F. (2001). *Prizma-2* (Vol. 2). Işık Yayıncılık Ticaret.

approached religious organizations or religious formations very cautiously, tried to control them and very often defined them as threatening and potentially separatist. Interestingly, despite the hostile attitude towards religion and authoritarian control of the governments, the faith-based Gülen Movement succeeded in building strong ties between Turkey and Central Asia by stressing/appealing to the same ethnic root (Turkic) and the same religion (Islam). Additionally, according to Clement (2011), who conducted ethnographic research in Turkish schools in Turkmenistan, the schools and the teachers of the schools - namely the disciples of the movement – introduced a secular curricula and strong moral framework (*terbiye*) which did not threaten the state (77).

The recent major split between the government and the movement once again has brought the discussion about the Turkish schools abroad into Turkish and foreign media. It is important to mention that the educational transnational activities of the movement have also strengthened the positioning of the movement in Turkey. While the movement is well-known for its religious activities and religious structure in Turkey, the Turkish schools outside the country exhibit a more secular profile. As of July 2014, the movement runs 30 high and secondary schools in Kazakhstan, 15 schools in Kyrgyzstan, about the same amount in Azerbaijan, and around 10 schools in Tajikistan (Balcı 2014<sup>12</sup>). There were more than 15 schools in Uzbekistan until they were shut down in 2001 due to the deterioration in Turkish-Uzbek relationships<sup>13</sup>. In Turkmenistan about twenty schools were expropriated by the government and re-named as Turkmen schools in 2011<sup>14</sup> with the change of the president and the government. Only two of the schools endured their existence since the government's decision to

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<sup>12</sup> Retrieved from: <http://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13006-what-future-for-the-fethullah-g%C3%BClen-movement-in-central-asia-and-the-cauca%E2%80%A6>

<sup>13</sup> The tensions between the states affected the presence of the movement in Uzbekistan. Uzbek government put a lot of restrictions to prevent the development of the movement and presence of Turks in the state. (Balcı 2010: 156-157)

<sup>14</sup> According to Horak the schools were closed “for the allegedly spreading the Islamic doctrine in the curriculum” (2013: 3). The second president of Turkmenistan Berdimuhamedov ordered to expropriate Turkish schools in 2011. The curricula, the textbooks and language of the lessons changed: the schools become Turkmen high schools with national curricula. The vast majority of teachers from Turkey had to fly back to Turkey.

make changes in the national public education system. Apart from these schools, there are universities in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan and private teaching institutions affiliated with the movement, that offer either language education (English and Turkish) or provide university exam preparation courses. The natural sciences and information technologies are mainly taught in English, while social sciences are taught in Russian, Turkish and vernacular language. The success of the schools is widely recognized in the region. The students of Turkish schools in the region win not only medals in the international olympiads mainly in natural sciences, but also scholarships from different universities abroad. The vast majority of the alumni of these schools enter universities outside their countries.

### **1.3. Literature Review and Situating My Research**

Due to the role of the *Hizmet* movement in Turkey and its transnational nature, the movement drew considerable attention of the scholars in Turkey and abroad. Some of the existing academic studies on the *Hizmet* movement explore the movement from a sociological point of view focusing on the collective action and mobilization, on the civic activism, and on the movement as a social organization (Çetin 2005, Ergene 2008, Özipek 2009, Toguslu 2007). There are a number of studies that explore theoretical and philosophical ideas of Fethullah Gülen with specific focus on his educational philosophy and ethics (Agai, 2002) on the synthesis of diverse ideas in science and religion (Bakar 2005, Kurtz 2005, Ünal and Williams 2001, West II 2006), on modernity (Kuru 2003) and on his views of piety and influence of Sufism in the movement (Michel 2005, Yavuz 2003, Özdalga 2009).

There are also studies concentrating on the ideas and practices of the movement in the realm of politics and economics (Gulay 2007, Gözaydın 2009, Koyuncu-Lorasdağı 2007, Başkan 2006, Ebaugh&Koç 2007). For instance, Gözaydın explores the movement in the light of relationship of the movement to the democratization process in Turkey (2009). Similarly, Koyuncu-Lorasdağı approaches the movement in her discussion of whether Islam, modernity and democracy can co-exist and whether this co-existence may offer prospects for democratization in Turkey (2007: 154). In the co-edited volume by M. Hakan Yavuz and John L. Esposito *Turkish Islam and the Secular*

*State: The Gülen Movement*, various chapters analyze “the significance of the movement in the shaping of the contemporary Islamic sociopolitical scene in Turkey”(Yavuz and Esposito 2003: vii). In the words of its editors, the academic works in this volume also “examine the intervening role of market forces in the interaction between the secular Turkish republic and Turkish Islamic sociopolitical movements” (ibid).

Most of the above-stated works conduct a macro-analysis of the movement primarily concentrating on the historical background of the movement within the context of Turkish political history. These works also expose the dynamic relationship of the movement with politics. There are scholars who explore the transnational element of the movement as well (Park 2007, Hunt&Aslandogan 2007, Pandya&Gallagher 2012). The co-edited volume by Pandya and Gallagher *The Gülen Movement and Its Transnational Activities: Case Studies of Altruistic Activism in Contemporary Islam* aims to scrutinize the transnational extension of the movement, focusing on the activism of the participants at the international level and the interfaith dialogue that the movement promotes (2012). The chapters in the book discuss international activism of the movement, its organization and institutionalization of the movement abroad in cases of different countries from Australia to Kosova and Nigeria. Some researchers have written extensively on the educational activities of the movement in different countries as well (Balci 2003, Clement 2011, Polat 2012, Aydin&Lafer 2012, Mehmeti 2012, Silova 2007, Hallzon 2008). For example, the scholarly literature on the movement in Central Asia mainly discusses the consolidation of the movement in the region, its influence in the nation-state building projects and the formation of the national consciousness, as well as the role of the movement in the education and formation of new “elites” (Balci 2003, 2014, Clement 2011, Turam 2007, Balci, Akkok & Engin 2000). The accounts of my participants do not only support these findings but also reveal the deterioration of educational systems in their home countries and the gendered practices in the educational systems both in Turkey and in Central Asian states.

Despite the abundancy of academic literature on the movement, there is a dearth of ethnographic research on the movement. One reason behind this gap in the literature is the difficulty of doing research on the movement. The movement constantly redraws and negotiates its boundaries with the outside world. In some contexts, the academic world remains outside the boundaries of the movement making ethnographic research



very difficult for the outsiders of the movement. Interestingly, the international scholarship constitutes more ethnographic work than the scholarship in Turkey. The movement established several platforms for the interfaith dialogue both in Europe and US (The Platforme de Paris in France, Fethullah Gülen Chair for Intercultural Studies at the University of Leuven in Belgium, Turkic American Alliance in Washigton, etc.). These organizations regularly host cultural and educational activities and conferences. The Rumi Forum is also one of the establishments that regularly organizes lectures and debates on religious, cultural and political topics (Balcı 2014). This Forum organizes major conference on the Gülen movement annually (ibid.). These conferences are prepared with the collaboration and assistance of other institutions that support the movement, for example, Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding at Georgetown University. One can argue that that the boundaries of the movement's organizations outside Turkey are more flexible and open to the academic world due to these platforms<sup>15</sup>. The movement attempts to gain credence from the society and the states where they establish their institutions through these platforms as well.

Though every work conducted on the movement is valuable, I recognize several limitations in the scholarship on the movement. As I already stated above, one of the main voids in the scholarly literature is the deficiency of ethnographic research. The participants and their daily lives and experiences remain understudied in the scholarship. Berna Turam is one of the scholars who conducted an in-depth ethnographic research on the movement in Turkey, Kazakhstan and US. Her book *Islam and the State* explores “how Islamic actors and the state transformed each other within the last decade” basing her arguments on the ethnographic work she conducted since 1997 (2007: 13). The experiences of the students who constitute the vast majority of the movement is also not sufficiently integrated into the scholarship. My study aims to contribute to this void by analyzing the everyday experiences of the women students from Central Asian in the movement in Turkey. In the scholarship that examines the transnational activism of the movement and the schools in Central Asia the incoming educational migration to Turkey from Central Asia fostered by the movement is missing as well. I believe that my research attempts to narrow down this gap by focusing on the

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<sup>15</sup> There are also similar platforms in Turkey as well such as Abant Platform tied to Journalists and Writers Foundation, the renowned organization of the movement or Diyalog Avrasya, Medialog Platform, etc.

lived experiences of the students and their perceptions. Basing my arguments with the specific focus on the women students, I aim to conduct gender analysis of their experiences, which also remains understudied. Adopting Scott's conceptualization of gender as "a useful category of historical analysis" (Scott 1999) I attempt to trace the gender formations and processes that establish them within the movement.

The gender segregation of the movement constitutes one of the reasons behind a lack of research on gender; the movement draws "shifting" boundaries between not only the outsiders and the participants but also between men and women members. One of the examples to this notion would be Berna Turam's experience of gendered attitude of the followers. She faced with the over-protective attitude of male participants of the movement, especially when she was outside Turkey, and related this to her gender. Furthermore, she contacted some of her women interviewees through their husbands and interviewed them in their apartments. The male participants who met with Turam in public space and were very friendly became "invisible" in their own houses, in their private sphere (Turam 2003: 117-119). I will discuss the literature on gender in detail in Chapter III and Chapter IV. Additionally, I would like to mention that my study aims to add up not only to the literature discussing gender issues and women's participation in the movement (Rausch 2008, Hallzon Pandya 2012, Stephenson 2006, Andrea 2007, Özdalga 2000, Curtis 2005) but also to built into the existing literature on women's mobilization in religious movements in Turkey (Arat 1999, Çakır 2000, Aktaş 2001). The particular contribution of my case study is its focus on the transnationality of the movement through the case of recruitment and mobilization of women university students from Central Asia.

#### **1.4. Research Participants**

##### **Selvi, 25, Turkmenistan**

Selvi studied in one of the Turkish high schools in Turkmenistan. She entered the examination<sup>16</sup> for foreign students in Turkey. At the moment of my interview with her,

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<sup>16</sup>The examination is called *YÖS* (Yabancı Öğrenci Sınavı) which is designed specifically for the foreign students to get into Turkish universities. Most of the

she had graduated from the university and was looking for a job in Turkey. I met with Selvi in one of her friends' house; she was very welcoming and talkative. The two reasons for her choice of education in Turkey were her friends in the school and the economic conditions of her family – as Selvi says, Turkey is considered to be economically more available. In her account, Selvi mentioned her brother working in Russia and her parents residing in Turkmenistan. According to Selvi, her parents supported her in acquiring higher education abroad and did not put any restrictions on her decisions. The moment I asked about her affiliation with the Gülen movement, Selvi ardently started to express her anger and dissatisfaction with the movement. Selvi identified herself as Christian and Russian. She talked very negatively about the movement and constantly referred to the oppression and discrimination that she was exposed to in the movement since her high school years. Selvi believed that her religious and national identities were the reasons of discrimination in the movement. She left the movement after a year of stay in *Hizmet* housing and moved to one of her friend's flats; however, after a while she wanted to return back to the movement and was not accepted. She narrated her hardships and blamed the movement for some of her problems. Selvi described her migration experience as a story of empowerment. She stressed that she was not willing to return back to her home as she felt free and independent in Turkey. Though Selvi reflected very negatively on the movement and its effects on her life, she also felt gratitude to some of the *ablas* who influenced her and served as examples of decency. I interviewed her in Russian but when it came to the specific terms used in the movement Selvi did not hesitate to switch to Turkish and demonstrated her familiarity with the language and discourse of the movement.

### **Gaye, 23, Turkmenistan**

Gaye became acquainted with the movement via the courses she took in one of the institutions of the movement in her home country. She was a senior student at a university at the time of the interview. Though Gaye became affiliated in Turkmenistan and was almost already familiar with the structure of the movement upon her arrival, she became aware of the transnational activism of the movement in Turkey. She defined

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applicants are the students from the post-Soviet countries. Until recently the students also could apply for the state-funded scholarship *TCS (Türkiye Cumhuriyetleri Sınavı)*. However, Turkmenistan opened the quota only for male students; thus, female students can apply only for *YÖS*.

herself as a dedicated follower. She was the only person I asked about Fethullah Gülen and his role in her life. The uneasiness of Gaye at this question made me erase this question from the list. I assume that both the recent events of 17th December 2013 and the hostile attitude of Turkmenistan's government towards any religious organizations were the main reasons of this silence. In her reply to this question she stated that her loyalty and devotion to the movement and to Gülen will continue despite all the smear campaigns. Though she was planning to work in state institutions after her graduation, Gaye underlined that she will continue her affiliation with the movement. On the other hand, she also expressed her dissatisfaction with the hierarchy in the movement and opposed some of the rules by breaking them. She was offered posts of *abla* several times but she refused them due to her busy schedule at the university. Strikingly, when I was inquiring about the effects of the movement on her life, Gaye continuously objected to the idea that the movement has changed her. She believed that her family already inflicted her the values that were identical with the movement's principles; thus, she narrated that her adaptation to the movement's environment was very quick. While, on the one hand, she was familiar with *sohbets* – as her father listened to them on the radio – and was fasting before she met with the followers, on the other hand, Gaye stressed on the broader impact of the movement on her life: she started to organize her life according to the movement. I will discuss this point in the coming chapters. According to Gaye, although her family does not know the movement very well, they share similar ideas.

#### **Yağmur, 24, Turkmenistan**

She arrived to Turkey following her relative. Her relative was an alumni of Turkish school in Turkmenistan and advised Yağmur to apply to the university after her unsuccessful attempts to get university education in Turkmenistan. Yağmur told me that her parents did not hesitate to send her to foreign country to get higher education . I interviewed Yağmur at the student housing and from her flatmates' attitude I understand that she was *abla* of the house; however, she was very unwilling to talk about her affiliation with the movement. The interview with Yağmur was the most challenging for me and can be considered as a turning point in my fieldwork. It was also the most embarrassing moment in my fieldwork, as I insistently asked her about the reasons of her silence. Her harsh response about the irrelevance of my question made me question my approach as a researcher. Yağmur defined herself as a very ambitious person and

perceived Turkey as a place of opportunities. She has been very active in the activities organized at university. Yağmur was very careful in choosing her words and answering my questions; she did not use word *Hizmet* or *Cemaat* throughout her story at all or did not tell anything about her relevance to and activism in the movement. However, she consistently underscored that “the environment she lives in” – namely the *Hizmet* movement– did not constrain her from anything.

### **Karanfil, 25, Turkmenistan**

She was the third year student and was planning to continue her job in the movement’s institution in Turkmenistan after the graduation. The aspiration of Karanfil to get education and her altruistic dedication – “to be useful to humanity” – impressed me and reminded me about Gülen’s messages on selflessness. She learned about the examination in Turkey in the educational centre of the movement in her home country and decided to apply. She demonstrated awareness about the gendered bias of her family and the state and expressed her disappointment with it: while her younger brother could apply for the state scholarships to study in Malaysia, China or Russia, she could not enter the exams as they were only for boys. Moreover, she was not as much encouraged by her family to study abroad as in the case of her younger brother: she applied and failed university examinations in Turkmenistan seven times and considered to study abroad only after her brother. Differently from her brother, she had to consider the economic situation of her family and act accordingly. “Turkey is the best chance for women students”<sup>17</sup>, says Karanfil. She openly talked about the (gendered) political violence of the state against students in her home country. Her narrative made an important contribution to my research as she reminded me about the diversity of the experience of the students according to their countries as well. The students from Turkmenistan whom I interviewed, except two, mainly remained silent about the gender discriminatory practices of the state and sometimes even legitimized these practices. Students from other Central Asian countries did not refer to the gender restrictions of the scholarship programs and were surprised at this information. Moreover, Karanfil was the only participant who made me comfortable while I was asking questions about the movement and the dynamics within it. She serves in the post of *abla* in the

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<sup>17</sup> Karanfil: kontenjan çok az. kontenjan çok az olduğu için o da zaten erkeklere var. bayanlara hiç yoktu. zaten bayanların yurtdışında okuması için en uygun bir yer daha doğrusu Türkiye olduğu için burayı seçtim.

movement. She used movement's discourse and movement's language extensively in her account.

### **Aylar, 26, Turkmenistan**

My interview with Aylar was the most lively as she had a very humorous style of telling her story. She had come back to Turkey for a couple of days and I had an opportunity to interview her in one of the student houses. We spent about two and half hours sharing stories and enjoying our dialogue. Aylar graduated from the Anatolian Turkish school in Turkmenistan. At the moment she is working outside Turkey. One of her friends studying in Turkey persuaded her to apply for the examination in Turkey and assured her family to allow Aylar to come to Turkey. Aylar already experienced the state violence when she was not permitted to cross the border when she got accepted in one of the universities in another Central Asian country. After several unsuccessful attempts to learn the reason of this intervention, she had quit the idea to study abroad. As Aylar narrated, she was not aware of her friend's affiliation with the movement. She was placed in one of the dormitories of the movement upon her arrival. Throughout her story Aylar mentioned about the hardships she had due to shortage of finances and thanked *Hizmet* for both the moral and the financial support. Currently, her ties with the movement are loose as she started working in a company. She served in *Hizmet* for a year and shared with me her experience of becoming an "unconventional" *abla*. I found her narrative very illuminating as it also breaks the homogeneity of representation of *ablas* that will be explored later. On the other side, she discussed the changes the movement brought to her life such as "modest" dressing or becoming more caring about other people. Aylar stressed that through her involvement in the movement her perceptions of justice and altruism have changed. Her mother and other members of her family were at first afraid at the quick changes but then were delighted with these changes as they did not seem to pose any danger.

### **Nergiz, 25, Turkmenistan**

She had graduated and was working in Turkey at the moment of the interview. She was planning to return home in several months. Nergiz has five sisters and is the only child with higher education in her family. She considers herself very lucky and encourages her youngest sister to apply to Turkish universities. Nergiz met the affiliates of the movement in Turkmenistan and was motivated by them to apply to universities in

Turkey. Her father was against this idea and favored the education in Russia instead of Turkey. Nergiz convinced her father in reconsidering his decision by giving examples of the affiliates from Turkmenistan who were already studying in Turkey. At the beginning of her interview she tried to avoid talking about her experience of affiliation in detail. She changed the subject to me the moment I asked about the movement: she reminded me that I was one of the first-comers and that my experience would be more interesting to listen. I did not object and shared some of my experience with her. After a while Nergiz herself started to comment and share her story, at least partially. She had been appointed to a post of *abla* for a year.

### **Gülnur, 26, Turkmenistan**

Gülnur graduated from the university several years ago and started working in Turkey. Her relative was a graduate of Turkish schools and encouraged her to study in Turkey. She married when she was a university student and has a child. She stayed in the movement for about three years. We met with Gülnur several times outside in a cafe and spent time together during her lunch breaks. In a long and friendly conversations she told me about her family and her future plans and dreams. Her narrative was overloaded with the comments and thoughts related to her family, her family-in-law and her home country. At the time of the interview, she and her husband were on the verge of deciding whether to leave Turkey and establish their life in Turkmenistan or to stay in Turkey. Gülnur's narrative prompted me to think about these students' perception of Turkey in relation to their home country. She classified two countries in opposite binaries and attributed certain adjectives and images to both of the destinations. In addition, I observed the similar impulse in my other participants' narratives and started to question these binaries. When I asked questions about *Hizmet*, Gülnur explicitly talked about her distanced attitude and unpleasant memories related to the movement. As she claims, she had to leave the movement because she was dating her current husband. Through her story, I also traced the generational differences between the newcomers and the first-comers.

### **Derya, 30, Tadjikistan**

Derya arrived in Turkey several years ago. She graduated from the university and started working in Turkey. She also had contradictory ideas about whether to return back to home country or to stay in Turkey. Similarly, most of the students I interviewed

expressed their anxiety and confusion. She was critical about the education system and gender-biased discrimination in her home country but excluded her family from the society she was talking about. As she narrated, her family was very supportive of her education.

### **Melisa, 26, Turkmenistan**

Melisa is a senior student and is planning to graduate this year. She invited me to her flat for the interview and told her story during dinner and tea. As Melisa narrates, her family, especially her mother was very encouraging of her university education. She learned about the university education in Turkey from the institutions of the *Hizmet* movement in Turkmenistan. Melisa is very active in the extracurricular activities at the university and helped me in reaching the women university students from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Even though she invited me to several activities organized by the movement, that involved international students, in our conversation she barely mentioned her activities in the movement and instead was very eager to talk about her life at the university. She plans to go back to Turkmenistan and work there. Melisa excitedly shared her experience and continuously stressed how busy her life in Turkey is. She is one of the members of committee in the student club which aims to raise “national” consciousness. Her interview made me consider the ethno-nationalist subjectivities shaped within the movement after the arrival of the students in Turkey.

### **Cemile, 22, Kyrgyzstan**

I met Cemile at one of the *Hizmet* movement’s activities and asked her to participate in my thesis research. She did not hesitate and invited me to her flat for the interview. Cemile is a graduate of the Turkish school in Kyrgyzstan. As she states, she is the youngest child in her family and her parents were not very willing to let her study abroad; however, she adds, after failing to get a scholarship in her country, she decided to apply to Turkey. Conversely, her teachers at the Turkish school favored the idea and encouraged her to apply to the universities in Turkey. For Cemile, moving to Turkey and becoming part of the *Hizmet* movement in Turkey was a “normal”(ized) process as she had already spent several years in the boarding schools of the *Hizmet* movement in Kyrgyzstan. Her reply to the question whether she is planning to stay in Turkey or go back to her country challenged my assumption that almost every student would want to stay abroad due to various reasons (unemployment, instabile economic condition,



different system, etc.). Although she did not talk about her position and post in the movement explicitly, she implied that she had responsibilities in the movement.

### **Ceren, 22, Kyrgyzstan**

Ceren was very shy and not very talkative at the beginning of the interview. After sharing some of my personal experience both in my home country and in the movement in Turkey, Ceren was less anxious and started to tell her story. She came to Turkey right after she graduated from the Turkish school in Kyrgyzstan. As she states, her parents registered her to the Turkish school so that she could get university education abroad. She was curious about my application to the university and the program I was enrolled in. When I asked Ceren about her future plans related to her affiliation in the movement and to going back to her home country, she replied that she was very undecided and caught in-between her aspiration to get a Master's degree and the urgency of performing *Hizmet* in her home country. Her account reminded me of my own hesitations and fears of putting "worldly" ambitions before the sacred duties. As she claims, she is very dedicated to the movement and perceives it as her family. When I asked whether she regards it as a second family, she immediately replied that she does not want to place it below her "biological" family.

### **Arzu, 22, Kazakhstan**

Arzu's case is different from any other participant's case. She applied to the university in Turkey without having any connection to the Turkish schools or other institutions of the movement in Kazakhstan. Her ambition to study in Turkey emanated, as she says, from her desire to know many languages and to be "as smart as the alumni of Turkish schools". She identified herself and her parents as atheists. Despite her parents' unwillingness to send her to a "Muslim" country, she entered university in Turkey. Arzu moved to the dormitories of the movement with her friend after several months from her arrival. In a short time she and her friend were offered to move to the *Hizmet* housing to which they agreed. There she spent almost a year and moved back to the university dormitory. Arzu's story enabled me to observe the experience of becoming a part of the movement for the person who is totally unrelated to the movement and has different religious identification from the rest of the affiliates.

### **Nazlı, 24, Kyrgyzstan**

Nazlı graduated from the Anatolian high school in Kyrgyzstan. She applied to Turkey with the encouragement of her teachers in the school. She met with the affiliates of the movement in the university dormitory in Turkey. After becoming friends with them she moved in the student housing of the movement. At the time of our interview Nazlı was a senior student. For her, Turkey is a place where her Muslim identity has been shaped. Additionally, her narrative extended my discussion on the formation of the nationalist and “Muslim” subjectivities. At my surprise, after the interview Nazlı asked about my opinion on the coming regional elections in Turkey and what my stance towards the ruling party was. This question did not only surprise me but also triggered me to think about the politicization of the subjects within the private space in the *Hizmet* movement.

### **Feride, 25, Kazakhstan**

Feride identified herself as Meskhetian Turk. During her interview Feride mostly narrated her family and did not mention much her affiliation with the movement. As she says, her family is very supportive of her university education. According to Feride, her migration to Turkey helped her to find her family roots and realize the importance of national identity. Her insights are very valuable to my research in terms of adding new questions to the construction of national imaginaries.

## **1.5. Outline**

In the following chapter of my thesis I will discuss how the students’ perceptions of Turkey mainly constructed by their acquaintance with the movement have effected their choices of university education. While problematizing the modernist discourse reflected in the narratives of my participants with a specific focus on the occidentalist perceptions of Turkey, I will explore how the movement and the relationships constructed within it assist in forming a holistic image of Turkey. I focus on how images of “safe” and “modern/civilized” Turkey have gone through certain transformations after the arrival of the students in Turkey in the following chapter.

The third chapter mainly concentrates on the *Hizmet* movement’s conceptualizing and practice of transnational relationships and on the role of kin terms in these

conceptualizations. I examine *Hizmet* housing as one of the central sites where fictive kin relations are consolidated. In this chapter, I also focus on the gender segregated, homosocial characteristic of this site of communal living and interaction. The chapter aims to underscore the significance of gender in my analysis of the *Hizmet* movement and community.

In the fourth chapter I explore the perceptions of my participants regarding gender inequities and leadership in the movement. Approaching the experiences of my participants through a gender lens, I question how these perceptions overlap with and are shaped by Gülen's ideas. By analyzing Gülen's ideas on women's positioning and their roles in the movement and the repercussions of the movement's discourse in the narratives of my participants I aim to contribute to the existing academic literature on the women affiliates of the Gülen movement by analyzing the case of women university students from Central Asia in the movement in Turkey.

## CHAPTER 2: BECOMING *RAYET*<sup>18</sup>: STUDENT MIGRATION FROM CENTRAL ASIA TO ANATOLIA FOSTERED BY THE *HIZMET* COMMUNITY

I must admit that my decision to study in Turkey was not a spontaneous choice but rather a strong will to follow the steps of my tutors who were from Turkey. It is important to note that I found this motivation also in other students' stories. I got acquainted with the Gülen movement in 2005 when I started to take English lessons to enter the university exams for studying abroad. At that point of my life, I did not realize and was never explicitly told that I was becoming a part of a large transnational community called the Gülen or *Hizmet* movement. For my participants, high level of corruption in education and the poor quality of national higher education were among the common reasons for leaving their country for education abroad. Also, relatively low cost of university education abroad, especially in the former Soviet countries, Turkey and China<sup>19</sup>, attracts the students from the Central Asian countries. The political, social

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<sup>18</sup> *Rayet* is a term used for the inhabitants of the student housing who usually do not have any duty in the movement but become a part of the movement. Using this term I do not suggest that my participants do not have posts in the movement but rather I aim to underline the process of integration in the movement. The term was used by two of my participants when talking about the inhabitants of the movement who do not have any duty. Actually, the term *rayet* is an Ottoman word which means a flag, a sign or a symbol. The term *rayet* reveals the movement's intention to name and identify each and every member of the movement as a representative of the community and a role model for the society.

<sup>19</sup> For more information on the corruption in education and student migration see: "*Education and the Crisis of Social Cohesion in Azerbaijan and Central Asia*" by

and economic hardships of the transition period in Central Asia have caused serious deterioration in educational system. The access and equity in education is limited to the culturally and economically privileged sections of society: “women and girls are worse off, rural areas more marginalized, and the students from low socioeconomic levels more under threat” (Silova, Johnson, and Heineman 2007: 173). Observing the results and possible “threats” for this crisis in education Silova et al. have identified two trends:

One is the pressure from *students seeking education outside the region*. Similar to migrants seeking external employment opportunity in the face of local economic stagnation, when a public school system collapses—whether from poverty, moral corruption, or ideological backwardness—individuals will take extraordinary measures to find opportunities to learn from more viable and compelling sources. Second, there are some safe sanctuaries within *local religious schools*, which, although terminal, do offer a secure sense of purpose and a welcome respite from the harsh inconsistencies of the failing state-sponsored secular systems. (Silova et al. 2007: 174)

These two trends can also be applied to my case study. The Turkish schools are among these “local religious schools” that provide “alternative” education to the state-sponsored educational system<sup>20</sup> (Balci 2010, Clement 2011, Demir, Balci and Akkok 2000). The alumni of Turkish schools who received multi-lingual education prefer to study abroad and had more chances in the competing sphere of higher education than the graduates of state schools. Primarily through the investments in education, the *Hizmet* movement contributed to the establishment of the stronger ties between Turkey and Central Asia (Balci 2010, Turam 2007, Clement 2011, Silova 2009) and to the migratory processes on this trajectory. It is important to note that the movement played a binding role between the Turkish state and the post-Soviet countries. Some of the Central Asian governments approached the Turkish government’s aspiration to revitalize the “union” of “Turkic brotherhood” cautiously as they feared “the Soviet hegemony” would be replaced by “Turkish” hegemony (Silova 2009: 188). However, the presence of Turkish schools in the region, their accordance with local governments and the shared goal with the governments of the post-Soviet republics – to fill the

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Silova, I, Mark S. Johnson, and Stephen P. Heyneman, 2007, *Comparative Education Review*, 51/2 p.159-180; “Educational Migration from Kazakhstan to China: A Shift Eastward?” by Sadovskaya, Y., 2013, *CACI Analyst*.

<sup>20</sup> The schools have been following a secular curriculum and have not contravened with the national agendas of the states. The word “alternative” here stands for the success of these schools in providing high quality education to the students and giving opportunities to study abroad.

imaginary gap in national identification and de-Russification of the societies – have assisted to redefinition of the role of Turkey in Central Asia (Silova 2009: 188). In her argument, Silova misses one point – even though governments of post-Soviet republics favor the pro-state and conformist attitude of the schools, the schools are constantly under the strict control of these governments. The closure of these private schools in Uzbekistan and in Turkmenistan demonstrates the vulnerable position of the movement in the region and its dependence on state policies.

Turkey has become one of the stops for the Central Asian students who have wanted to pursue their education abroad since the 2000s. Not only the alumni of the Turkish schools but also the students who attended university examination courses or language courses of the movement in Central Asia have been motivated to apply to the universities in Turkey. All of my participants who were already in touch with the *Hizmet* movement in their home countries talked about the followers' encouragement to apply to the universities in Turkey. Those who were not familiar with the education system and examination in Turkey were provided with the necessary books and information. The students already studying in Turkey and the prospective students were put in contact for further networking:

Karanfil: First of all, ehm, we live in Turkmenistan. My family is there. Well, we registered for the courses in one of the language centers. There were English, Turkish and Mathematics. We registered there. Then there were *these teachers who were taking care of us, who were friends with us and who shared the same thoughts the same opinion with us. They told us that it would be better for us to study here [in Turkey].* It is very difficult to enter university in our country [...] <sup>21</sup> (my italics)

Gaye: I finished my school. Then the preparatory school. I came here with the advice of *my friends, the teachers in this preparatory school.* <sup>22</sup> (my italics)

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<sup>21</sup> Karanfil: [...] ilk başta şey vardı biz zaten şeyde yaşıyoduk Türkmenistan'da yaşıyos. Ailem de orda. İşte ben erkek kardeşimle orda bir tane kurs merkezi vardı oraya kaydolduk. Orda zaten İngilizce Türkçe ve Matematik dersi kursları vardı. Ona gittik işte. Sonra *bizimle ilgilenen yani daha doğrusu bizimle çok iyi arkadaş olan hocalarımız, bizimle aynı düşünceyi paylaşan aynı fikirde olan insanlar vardı.* İşte hani onlar da *burada okumamızın bizim için daha iyi olacağını söylediler.* bizde zaten bizim memleketimizde [...] baya zor şartlar altında üniversite kazanmak...(my italics)

<sup>22</sup> Gaye: Okulu bitirdim. Dersane. Ondan sonra işte dersanedeki *arkadaşların, hocaların tavsiyesi ile* buraya geldim (my italics).

The difference of this particular student migration is that it is informed by a religious movement through the establishment of warm interpersonal relationships. In their narratives, my participants reflected very positively on their relationships with their teachers from the movement back in their home country. Moreover, these friendly relationships play an important role in the recruitment process and mobilization of the students in the movement. As it is suggested in Karanfil's narrative, these are not simply the teacher-student relationships but rather warmer friendships and, in some cases, comradeship relationships. The changing dynamics of these relationships will be discussed in the following chapters. For the purposes of this chapter I will concentrate on how the students' perceptions of Turkey (mainly constructed by their acquaintance with the movement) have affected their choices of university education. In the following sections of this chapter I will elaborate on the modernist discourse reflected in the narratives of my participants with a specific focus on the occidentalist perceptions of Turkey. I will explore how the movement and the relationships constructed within it assist in forming a holistic image of Turkey.

I observed two main trends in the perceptions of Turkey in my interviewees' motivation to apply to Turkish universities. First, the image of Turkey as a modern and developed country, claiming its "place" in the European Union, frequently emerged as an encouraging impulse to obtain university education in Turkey. Second, the (gendered) notion of safety and protection has been underlined by many of my research participants while narrating the reasons for their choice of Turkey. These two images – "safe" and "modern/civilized" Turkey have gone through some transformations after the arrival of the students in Turkey, which I also discuss later in the chapter.

### **2.1. *The Mind of a Small Child is not the Same with the Mind of an Adult: An Occidental perception of Turkey***

One of the striking themes that emerged in the narratives of my participants is the continuous echoing of the modernist discourse of belatedness. The division of "East" and "West" have been problematized and scrutinized in studies of Orientalism and Occidentalism. Additionally, as Ahiska argues, going beyond the "East-West" divide is not sufficient; we should "remember the historical divide as constitutive of both the

‘Western’ and ‘Eastern’ modernities” (2003: 354). One of the most common metaphors used in the conceptualization of “belated modernity” is the metaphor of missing the train. The metaphor has been used to explicate the desire for “Western” future and “already-late, always-postponed ideal” (Ahiska 2003:352). In her analysis of Turkish modernity and national identity Ahiska points to the ambivalent positioning of Turkey – both “geographically and in “temporal signification” – in between East and West; in between “backwardness and progress” (2003: 353). Nalçacıoğlu states that “being *always already late*” has been used as a determining factor of self-identity in the non-Western contexts (as cited in Ahiska 2003: 354). Similarly, Göle claims that non-Westerners are estranged from their own presents in the process of “projecting themselves either to utopian future or to the golden age of the past” (as cited in Ahiska 2003: 354). Borrowing Ahiska’s theorization of belated modernity, I argue that the national identifications of the students and their perceptions of Turkey as a “model” replicates the occidentalist desire constructed through “absences” and “lacks”. Indeed, as Ahiska puts it:

Despite its pragmatic fluidity, the consequent national discourse was structured in and through a fantasy. The diverse realm of relations with the Western countries was translated into a marker called “the West”; in a similar manner, the heterogeneous realm of the population was signified as “the people”, which represented the Orient in terms of “backward” Islamic and Arabic influences. The Occidentalist fantasy evoked a “lack” in “the people” upon which it organized the “desire” to fill it. This was in close connection to the lack projected onto the Turkish by the Orientalist fantasy. They function in the same economy of identity and desire (Ahiska 2003: 364-365).

In my interviewees’ comparison of their home country with Turkey, there lies a modernist and occidentalist imaginary: Turkey is a modern Muslim country with high quality education, innovative buildings and constructions, and progressive technology. At this point, it should be noted that the Gülen movement’s schools both inside and outside the country are very modern constructions with up-to-date equipment and technology. The schools are not only famous for the successful education in science but also in computer and Internet. The modernist outlook that is reproduced in the narratives of my informants in various forms, in some places, takes a form of an occidentalist discourse, a fantasy and a desire for the modern. This idealized and romanticized perspective in the students’ accounts should/do not remain separate from the movement’s discourse on the modernity and belatedness. The ambivalent



positioning of the *Hizmet* movement towards the “West”<sup>23</sup> finds its way in the narratives of my participants as well. The movement’s aspiration to raise a “Golden Generation”<sup>24</sup> expands to the construction of “Türkiye Sevdalıları”<sup>25</sup> in the case of international students:

The educational activities that are conducted with a lot of altruism all over the globe are self-evident. I never forget one moment. They asked a Russian student in a commencement ceremony in Moscow: “What is your ideal for future? What would you like to do in the future?” The student answered: “*At the beginning I would like to establish good relationships with Turks*”. I cried at this tableau. Do not underestimate this scene. *Today we have many brothers/sisters and friends all over the world. Besides this, there are numbers of people who are doubtful but in the process of decision about establishing friendly and fraternal relationships with this country [Turkey] with the people of this country. These are very significant building blocks for the future of Turkey in the future of the world.* (my italics, Gülen 2004<sup>26</sup>)

As it is suggested in Gülen’s words, Turkey is and should be a desired destination for the international affiliates of the movement. The notion of belatedness can be distinguished in almost all of my interviews. Turkey is imagined as a new “West”. It is

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<sup>23</sup> For more information on the *Hizmet* movement and modernity see: Kuru, A. T. (2003). Fethullah Gülen’s search for a middle way between modernity and Muslim tradition. *Turkish Islam and the secular state: the Gülen movement*, 115-130; Thomas Michel, S. J. (2005). Sufism and modernity in the thought of Fethullah Gülen. *The Muslim World*, 95(3), 341-358; Eldridge, B. (2007). The Place of the Gülen Movement in the Intellectual History of Islam, Particularly in Relation to Islam’s Confrontation with Postmodernism. *Muslim World in Transition*, 526-38.

<sup>24</sup> For more on the raising of Golden Generation and *insan-kamil* (“perfected human being”) see: Toguslu, E. (2007). Gülen’s theory of adab and ethical values of Gülen movement. *Muslim World in Transition: Contributions of the Gülen Movement*, 445-458; Agai, B. (2002). Fethullah Gülen and his Movement’s Islamic Ethic of Education. *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies*, 11(1), 27-47.

<sup>25</sup> *Sevdalı* means someone in a passionate love with someone/something.

<sup>26</sup> Dünyanın dört bir yanında, ancak nice fedakarlıklarla yapılabilen eğitim faaliyetleri ortada. Hiç unutmadığım bir hatıram var: Moskova’da yapılan mezuniyet töreninde bir Rus öğrenciye sordular: “İlerisi için idealin nedir, gelecekte ne yapmak istersin?” Öğrencinin verdiği cevap şu oldu: “*Başta Türkler’le iyi bir münasebete geçmek isterim.*” Ağladım bu tablo karşısında ben. Hafife almayın bu manzarayı. *Bugün dünyanın dört bir yanında pek çok kardeş ve dostumuz var. Bunun yanında mütereddit ama karar aşamasında tercihini bu ülke ile, bu ülke insanı ile dostluk ve işbirliği istikametinde kullanacak bir çok insan var. Bunlar geleceğin dünyasında geleceğin Türkiye’si için çok önemli kaideler yani yapı taşlarıdır.* (my italics, Gülen 2004) Retrieved from: <http://www.herkul.org/kirik-testi/turkiye-sevdalıları>

framed as a model for Central Asia, which is “late” in everything: in becoming democratic, in developing according to “world standards”. As Ahiska suggests:

[T]he critical study of Occidentalism not only deals with the ambivalent identity of the non-Western but also conveys that the imagined Western gaze is an integral part of this identity. It attends to how “center” and “periphery”, or “model” and “copy”, are already inscribed in the conception of modernity. (2003: 369)

In their narratives, my interviewees infantilized their national identity and home country in comparison with Turkey. Infantilization and the depiction of the other/the Orient as immature and irrational is not a self-defined notion but rather “the whole complex series of knowledgeable manipulations by which the Orient was identified by the West” (Said 1991: 40). When I asked Nergiz whether she sees any differences in the education system of her home country and Turkey, she surprisingly compared her home country (Turkmenistan) with Turkey using image of a small child and an adult:

Nergiz: Just one example, *the mind of a small child and of an adult can not be same... of course, you can never compare the mind of a big country with a small country. Turkey is much more developed than Turkmenistan. A more developed country, in other words Europeanized, much more developed, much more developed, maşallah. Thus, you can not compare. If Turkmenistan was the same age, if they were equal... we just gained our Independence in 1991. We gained it in 1991, 1995. They celebrate the 80th anniversary, we just the 23rd. We are not of the same age. That is it. The mind of a small child and of an adult are never the same. Of course, it [Turkmenistan] is developing but you should wait. Turkey is a developed country, that is to say in education, in every sphere.*<sup>27</sup> (my italics)

Imagining Turkey as an adult, Nergiz symbolically associates her home country with an underdeveloped child. The “immaturity” and “underdevelopment” of her home country is identified through the progress of Turkey. The same rhetoric repeats itself in most of the narratives. Gaye admits that she faced this feeling of belittlement and devaluation, of being late and underdeveloped.

Gaye: I came here for a university exam... it [Turkey] was very beautiful and I felt like I was living twenty – thirty years behind. Well, it is a very

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<sup>27</sup> Nergiz: Bir örnek *küçük çocukla büyük çocuğun akli aynı olmaz ... o küçük ülkeyle büyük ülkenin tabii aklını eşit getiremezsin...* Türkiye daha gelişmiş Türkmenistan’a göre. Daha gelişmiş bir ülke, Avrupalılaşmış yani, baya gelişmiş, baya gelişmiş maşallah. O yüzden eşitleyemezsin. Eşit ülke olsaydı Türkmenistan eşit bir yaşta olsaydı.. daha bağımsızlığımızı 91de aldık. 91 95 de aldık bağımsızlığımızı. bunlar taa 80. yılını kutluyor, biz de gelyoruz 23. Aynı yaşta değiliz. Aynı onun gibi. *Küçük çocukla büyük çocuğun akli aynı gelmez.* Tabii gelişiyor ama bekliceğin yani. Türkiye gelişmiş bi ülke, yani eğitim sisteminden de her yönden de.

developed country, for me at least, comparing to my country many things are developed. I can even give examples of the toilets and taps.<sup>28</sup>

Likewise, Gülnur expressed her fascination with the “civilization” and “civilized” attitude of people in Turkey through her mother’s visit. During my interview with Gülnur, she expressed her anxiety and undecisiveness to move back to her home country or to stay in Turkey for the rest of her life. She said that the reason she wants to stay in Turkey is that she wants to “move forward” and does not want to “move backward” which she associated with going back to her country. This feeling of backwardness arises in the narratives of my informants in the form traditional versus modern society discourse. For Gülnur, moving back to her country meant going back to traditions and customs. Although, she spent her childhood and teenage years in Turkmenistan, she repeated several times that her consciousness and worldview has been shaped in Turkey.

It is interesting that these replies emanated when I inquired about their opinion on the education systems and the reasons for their choice of Turkey. During and after the fieldwork, I was looking for the critical outlooks on the education system in the students’ narratives – at the beginning of my research, I wrongly recognized educational deterioration in the region as the primary reason of their migration. Conversely, I was confronted with the justification of the problems through a modernist discourse of being still immature and young. This notion is not specific to my case. The urgencies of the present time are disguised by the concerns of “being late”:

The metaphor of “catching the train of Western civilization” both channels and frustrates the desires of the people to be modern. The anxiety of “being late” puts a barrier to critical and creative thinking that could have attended to the questions of the present. (Ahıska 2003: 369)

Interestingly, my interviewees compared Turkey not only to their home countries but also to other countries where there is a mass student migration from Central Asia – to Russia or other Russian-speaking post-Soviet countries, to US and to China. Nazlı’s account is very significant in this sense:

Nazlı: I was planning to go to America before my arrival to Turkey, I was preparing for TOEFL. *But when comparing Turkey with America, also our*

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<sup>28</sup> Gaye: [...] sınava geldim... çok güzeldi ve hani 20-30 sene geride yaşadığımı hissettim. hani çok gelişmiş bir ülke, hani bana göre, benim ülkeme göre çok şeyler gelişmiş. Bi tuvalet bi musluk da bile örnek verebilirim.

*teachers were, well, you get impressed by your teachers, may be they were depicting it very beatifully, may be because of that when I was imagining Turkey it was always bright, but when I thought of America it was something dark and foggy. I don't know whether this happened to everyone or just to me but it was something like that*<sup>29</sup>. (my italics)

Turkey replaces other “Western” countries in the imaginaries of these students. As I already mentioned earlier, the ambiguous relation of the movement with the “West” echoes in the students’ stories. Basing my arguments on the differences and commonalities in the experiences and perceptions of the students who were alumni of the Turkish schools and those students who get acquainted with the movement in Turkey or through other educational institutions in their home country, I argue that there are two distinctions made in their stories: Turkey is modern and “safe” while the rest of the “Western” countries are modern but “unsafe”. I will explore this notion and its gendered dynamics further in this chapter.

In other words, it is important to note how the movement or its image affected the decisions of the students to come to Turkey rather than getting education in Russia or other countries. The lines distinguishing Turkey from other countries became more blurry after their involvement in the movement. My informants compared Turkey to other countries in terms of morality, modernity; and attitude towards people from Central Asia. Gaye was telling about her fears to become like “them” – “they” are those who live a free, unconstrained life. She worries that her moral principles would “be damaged”, that she will cross the forbidden lines.

Gaye: I had to got to Russia to university, well, I dont know why but I felt that I will be safer here, I will be safe here. I can say that I chose here because of that... When I compare Russia and this side [Turkey], there there is more unrestricted life. I am not used to that unrestricted life, I thought I would be harmed...

#### **Would be harmed in what sense?**

Gaye: Well, [it is like] stepping out from the way my mother and my father raised me. May be it can be called tradition. Well, their way of raising and

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<sup>29</sup> Nazlı: Gelmeden önce şöyle bir ara Amerika’ya gitmeyi planlıyodum TOEFL’a hazırlanıyodum ama ikisini karşılaştırdınca hem Türkiye hem Amerika’yı karşılaştırdınca birde *hocalarımız çok şeydi ya etkilenirsin ya hocalarından belki Türkiye’yi çok güzel mi anlatırlardı o yüzden mi hayali olarak Türkiye’yi düşününce bir aydınlık oluyordu Amerika’yı düşününce de karanlık dumanlı bişey oluyordu.* bilmiyorum herkese oluyomuydu öyle bişey yoksa bana mı sadece. öyle bişey olmuştu.

our way of raising is different. Well, let me say, I was *afraid of being lost*.<sup>30</sup>  
(my italics)

Nergiz: Because I never saw it, it was just what I saw on the television... I did not know Turkey in person... That's the thing, *you know that you will not be influenced in a bad way because it is a religious country*. I knew that if I do not sin it will not lead me to somewhere [to sin]<sup>31</sup>.

In their comparison of Turkey with the other countries my participants reflected on their parents' experiences of being a Soviet citizen and studying in the universities in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Kiev and other Russian-speaking countries. According to my interviewees, while some of the parents wish to send their children to these countries, others, even though they studied there, are against this idea due to the rising neo-nazism in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. In Gülnur's and Melisa's stories, their fathers utter this uneasiness in a very explicit way:

Gülnur: He says, when I hear the words Russia or Moscow the fear grips me. How do people go there, how do they go and come? As if there all the Central Asians are badly treated, because we reveal ourselves with our appearance.<sup>32</sup>

Melisa: My father's perception of Russian countries is different. He served his military service in Germany and because he saw different countries and watched in the films, he knows that there is a lot of mafia and immorality, etc. and because he knows the language and is familiar with everything, he

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<sup>30</sup> Gaye: Rusya'ya gitmeliydim ben hani üniversiteye, hani şey açısından ne biliyim *burda daha güvenli hissedeceğimi, güvende olacağımı hissettim*. O yüzden burayı seçtim diyebilirim... Rusya tarafı ile bu tarafı kıyasladığımda o tarafta daha çok *serbest yaşam* var. Ben o serbest yaşama alışık olmadığım için hani orda daha çok *zedeleneceğimi düşündüm*...

**Gaye, ne açıdan peki zedeleneceğini düşündün?**

Hani anne-babamın yetiştirdiği tarzdan çıkma. Adet mi diyim artık. Hani onların yetiştirme tarzı farklı bizim yetiş tarzımız farklı. Hani böyle *kaybolacağımdan korktum* diyim.

<sup>31</sup> Nergiz: Hiç görmeğidim için sadece televizyondaki gördüklerim.. yani insan olarak tanıımıyordum ama Türkiye.. şöyle bi şey var *dindar bi ülke olduğu için* insan sonuçta yani böyle nasıl diyim *kötü yönde etkilenmeyeceğini biliyorsun* yine de kötü yönden kötü örnek yani nefesine uymadıktan sonra seni alıp bir yere koymayacağını da biliyodum yani.

<sup>32</sup> Gülnur: Ben, diyo, Rusya yada Moskova kelimelerini duyduğum anda beni korku sarıyo. İnsanlar nasıl oraya gidiyorlar, gidip geliyorlar? Sanki orda bütün Orta Asya'lılara, çünkü biz kendimizi dış görünüşümüzle ele veriyoruz, kötü davranıyorlar.

is afraid, I guess. Well, my father does not pray but he [supports] Islam. We chose here [Turkey] because it is a Muslim country<sup>33</sup>.

Similarly, Yağmur told me about how her sister studying in Russia was exposed to the hate speech and nationalist violence in her everyday life. Positioning other “Western” destinations as dangerous and corrupt, the modernist discourse replicated in the narratives of the students places Turkey on the opposite side of this binary as a “safe” and “modern” country. Different from other cases, the “Islamic” identity plays a significant role in this positioning. While the movement tries to dispel the anti-Islamic representations, especially elevated in the “West” after 9/11, it reproduces the binaries of various modernities. Though I do not aim to conduct a detailed analysis of the modernist discourse reproduced by the movement here, it would be useful to look at Gülen’s perspective on modernity and the “West”. The following passage from the movement’s magazine *Fountain* reveals the ambivalence of Gülen’s stance:

The modern Western world-view is said to be founded almost entirely on materialistic notions excluding, even denying, the spiritual or metaphysical dimension of existence. This is a controversial point but many so-called intellectuals in the Muslim world, who do no more than *blindly imitate* what they see as Western and *import* it, *despise and reject whatever constituted the traditional modes of thinking and living in their societies*. This is largely because *they have lost all awareness of the spiritual dimension of man's existence and life*. [...] Moreover, since those whose only skills consist in imitating are more radical in the attitudes they appropriate than even those from whom they appropriated them, and since *imitation is often an obstacle to seeing the reality*, those so-called intellectuals in the Muslim world, besides being more radical in rejecting what is spiritual and metaphysical, lack adequate knowledge about matter and what is material. (Gülen 1997)<sup>34</sup>

Besides his focus on spirituality in his article, he talks in binary oppositions and reproduces the concepts of “imitation” and “an origin” in his writings that are already embedded in the modernist discourse.

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<sup>33</sup> Melisa: Rusya devletlerine babamın algısı farklı onlara karşı. Askerliğini Almanya’da yaptı. ve başka ülkeleri de gördüğü için ve filmlerde falan çok izlediği için mafya çok, ahlaksızlık falan filan bunları biliyor. bir de dilini iyi bildiği için her yönüyle tanıdığı için korkuyor heralde. ee benim babam namaz kılmaz ama muslumanlığı şey yapar. musluman ülke diye burayı seçtik yani.

<sup>34</sup>Gülen, F. (1997) *The Horizon Of Hope: Spiritual Or Metaphysical Thought* in *Fountain* (Issue 20), retrieved from: <http://www.fountainmagazine.com/Issue/detail/The-Horizon-Of-Hope-Spiritual-Or-Metaphysical-Thought>.

## 2.2. Trust and Reliability: Turkey “is a safe place”

The perception of Turkey and the *Hizmet* movement are not separate in the narratives of my informants; they are interchangeable and interrelated. As most of my interviewees pointed out, their parents were impressed by the welcoming and intimate approach of the teachers and tutors towards their children. The community’s followers pay a lot of attention to the construction of informal warm links with the family as well. They organize special programs and celebrations for the parents of their students and also visit the houses of the students. As Clement asserts, the main reasons for the parents’ favorable response to the Turkish schools are that they are compatible with “social values” and provide an opportunity to get a good job (2011: 84). In almost all of the stories, my informants narrated that their parents trusted and felt safe related to the teachers of Turkish schools. When I asked my participants how they learned about the education in Turkey they replied as follows:

### How did you learn about Turkey? Just through your brother?

Derya: Yes, they[teachers of the Turkish schools] loved us. When people are in city, they miss fresh air and nature. They visited us very frequently, especially in spring months. Through my brother and his teachers... we had a detached house in Tadjikistan. How to say, in the highlands. They were very nice people. My family, we all, had very positive thoughts about Turks. Positive opinions. My brother also always praised them when he came back home. It was good, there were no prejudice against Turks. They had good opinion because of that they did not put a strain<sup>35</sup>. (my italics)

Gaye: ... first, they asked whether “there were trustable people? Someone to help you? Someone you know? Well, I replied that there were *these and that people, they are studying, they are trustable. Then, you can go they said... Well, there is this trust, I don’t know maybe because it is a Muslim country.. they did not have bad thoughts about this place [Turkey] ...*<sup>36</sup> (my italics)

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### <sup>35</sup> Türkiye’yi nasıl tanıdım? Sadece abim aracılığıyla mı?

Derya: Evet, çok severlerdi. Şimdi şehirde olunca insanlar özlerler temiz havadır doğadır. Sık sık gelirlerdi bize, özellikle, bahar aylarında. Ve abim aracılığıyla birde hocaları... biz Tacikistan’da mustakil bir evimiz vardı işte. Nasıl derler böyle yaylada işte. Onlar çok iyi insanlardı. Ha, *annemler ve ailecek çok olumlu düşünceler vardı Türklerle ilgili. Olumlu bir düşünceleri vardı. Abim de sürekli övüyordu hep geri gittiğinde. İyi, bir önyargı hiç yoktu Türklere karşı. İyi bir düşünceleri vardı o yüzden bir sıkıntı çıkarmadılar.* (my italics)

<sup>36</sup> Gaye: ... ilk önce sordukları güvendiğin kişiler var mı orda? sana yardım edebilecek kişiler var mı? tanıdığın kişiler var mı? dediler. İşte söyledim *böyle böyle kişiler var,*

Ceren: My family did not restrict me with anything in any way. For example, when I was leaving abroad they did not wonder where I was going with whom I was going, who was going to meet me, because *they knew that everything was prepared by my teachers by the Turkish school and they trusted the Turkish school very much and they were right in trusting them because I did not experience anything bad there*. If I experience something bad I tell them. They never felt distrust towards me. They always let me be free, I entered university and they sent me here, they never asked where and with whom I am staying... *They do not know that I am staying in the Hizmet housing; they do not know Hizmet. They just know that this is a safe place...* normally, the one would wonder who their daughter is staying with but they did not ever ask. I do not know maybe they think I will not tell them but when I am at the housing I photograph the housing and send them. I show them my friends photos as well. They should be comfortable, there is nothing [bad] here.<sup>37</sup>

It is important to note that neither the students nor the parents are very much familiar with the structure and the activities of the movement and its spiritual leader due to the closed structure of the movement. Broadly speaking, Turkish schools are still perceived as private schools founded and funded by the Turkish businessmen who have launched branches of their companies in Central Asia. The student housings and dormitories of the movement in Turkey become part of this picture: these housings are sponsored by “some rich” Turkish (business)men who are presented as eager supporters of the students. Before arrival to Turkey, the teachers and tutors in the Turkish schools are not imagined as the affiliates of the movement but rather distinguished as “Turks” in the visionaries of the students. While Gülnur was describing her mother’s visit to Turkey, she excitedly talked about her mother’s impression of Turkey and of Turkish

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*okuyolar, tanıdığım kişiler, güvendiğim kişiler o yüzden gidebilirsin dediler... hani bir güven var, ne bilim belki müslüman ülke olduğu için... hani bir karşı kötü düşünceleri yoktu buraya karşı...* (my italics)

<sup>37</sup>Ceren: ben işte ailem bana hiç bişeyi yasaklamadı nedense hiç mesela yurtdışına çıkacağım zaman da hani hereye gidiyorsun kiminle gidiyorsun seni kim karşılayacak hiç bişey merak da etmediler çünkü *hepsini öğretmenlerimin hazırladığını biliyorlardı türk okulunun hazırladığını biliyorlardı ve türk okulunu o kadar güveniyorlardı ve güvenmekte zaten haklılar be hiç kötü bişey yaşamadım. bişey yaşarsam da anlatıyorum hani kötü bişey olduğu zamanlar. hiç böyle hani güvenmemezlik durumu olmadı bana. çok rahat bıraktılar hiç bişey yapmadılar sadece kazandım ve gönderdiler beni buraya, nerde kalacağım kiminle kalacağım hiç sormadılar ... Hizmet evinde kaldığımı bilmiyorlar Hizmeti bilmiyorlar. sadece güvenli bir yer olduğunu biliyorlar o kadar ... hani şey normalde bir insan kızın sonuçta kimlerle yaşadığını merak eder ya hiç bişey sormuyorlar. bilmiyorum belki ben anlatmam diye düşünüyorlardır ama eve giderken mesela evin resimlerini falan çekiyorum gösteriyorum onlara arkadaşlarımla resimlerini falan gösteriyorum yinede. rahat olsunlar sonuçta bir şey yok burda.*



people. Interestingly, she used the same language and the similar words while she was describing her relation and stance towards the movement:

Gülnur: Her first impressions were super!.. of course, because it is safe here, because they are Turks. They are very helpful, for example, the status of the students is different here. They want to help here no matter what. In short, this logic, this life understanding was... very strange for her. There is nothing like this in Turkmenistan. Hence, she was very relieved.<sup>38</sup>

Gülnur told me that she felt safe and taken care of when she was affiliated with the movement. I argue that the notion of safety that finds expression in these narratives is deeply gendered. It is possible to argue that the choices of higher education or the country for the university of women students from Central Asia is primarily based on the degree of “safety” of the country, which is often expressed through gender. The lack of statistical data on exploring the gender dynamics of this particular student migration makes this analysis more difficult. What is significant in my participants’ stories is that the parents trust the interlocutors (mostly the teachers and administrators of the Turkish high schools) and consign their daughters to “safe hands”. As one of my participants, Karanfil, believes, “the most convenient place for the ladies to study is Turkey”<sup>39</sup>. In their stories my informants relate their parents’ trust towards the teachers of the Turkish schools, without knowing about the global community of the movement, and to Turkey. Turkey is imagined as a safe place. This imaginary is not constructed after the students’ arrival to Turkey but before they leave their country. Although the students’ families were not fully aware of the movement, according to the narratives of my participants, they felt more convinced after they witnessed the caring, protective and welcoming attitude of the teachers.

It is not only parents, but the students themselves who do not initially recognize that they are joining an international religious community. There is no formal membership or involvement process in the *Hizmet* movement. The informal networks of

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<sup>38</sup> Gülnur: İlk izlenimleri tabii ki de süperdi!...*Tabii ki de burası daha rahat olması duygusu, yanii Türkler olduğu için.* Onlar çok yardımsever, mesela öğrencilerin statüsü burda çok daha farklı. Burda yardım etmek istiyolar her ne olursa olsun. Kısacası bu mantık bu hayat görüşü onunkiyle [annem’in] ona çok garip geliyordu. Yani sonuçta bizim Türkmenistan’da böyle bi şey yok. O yüzden çok rahatlamıştı.

<sup>39</sup> Karanfil: [...] zaten bayanların yurtdışında okuması için en uygun bir yer daha doğrusu Türkiye olduğu için burayı seçtim.

followers and like-minded people make it difficult to distinguish the number of members. What unites all the stories of the students is that they realized being a part of the movement and discerned “vastness” of the movement in terms of internationality only when they were outside their home country. Gaye told me that she learned about her indirect involvement in the community when she came to Turkey:

Gaye: I did not know about these things in Turkmenistan. well, in this way, I was not familiar with cemaat. after my arrival I learned that it is cemaat, that it is broad and well, is divided on branches. There [in Turkmenistan] it was not explained and I was not interested. I trusted the place my friends stayed. If they were safe they I will be.<sup>40</sup>

Strikingly, the alumni of the Turkish schools whom I intervieweed expressed the same notion: they were not aware of the movement’s international networks and did not recognize it as a religious movement. For instance, Selvi’s reaction at the “news” about her school reminded her the details she could not understand when she was a student in the high school and how these details fit in with her “new” picturing of the movement and the school in one framework:

Selvi: I was pretty shocked, when I learned that the high school where I studied was cemaat’s high school. At the beginning I did not understand. Right, first the skirts should be knee-high, then they said they should be longer than knee-high... It was such kind of high school. And such things happened: they shoved books to our girls. They did not show these book to me, but of course I started to notice these books. They had to cover the books. Later they started to give those to me as well. I reacted by asking why should I read it, I did not understand, why it should be necessary for me? well, you know... I did not understand. Then, they were keeping us after the lessons. We already had eight lessons and had to stay for etude hours. and all the topics, whether it is friendship or cleanliness, all of them were slowly sliding to religion.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Gaye: Türkmenistan’da bilmiyordum bu şeyler hakkında. hani böyle böyle. cemaat hakkında pek tanımiyordum. buraya geldikten sonra hani bir cemaat halinde olduğunu geniş boyutlu hani dallara falan ayrıldığını buraya geldikten sonra öğrendim. orda pek anlatılmadı da ilgilenmedim de nedense. işte burdaki arkadaşların kaldığı yerlere güvendim. hani onlar orda kaldıysa güvende bende güvendeyim.

<sup>41</sup> Selvi: *ben baya şoka girdim, benim okuduğum lisenin cemaat lisesi olduğunu öğrenince şok oldum.* Ben en başta anlamıyordum. Tamam başta etekler diz boyunda olmalı sonra etekler dizinin aşağında olacak dediler... Böyle bir lisemiş orası. Ve şöyle bişey oluyordu bizim kızlara kitap sokuşturuyolardı. Onlar bana o kitapları göstermiyodular, ben tabii bunları görmeye başladım. Onlar kitapların dışını kaplamak zorundaydılar. Daha sonra onlar kendileri bana o kitaplardan vermeye başladılar. Ben bu okumalı mıyım diye çıktım, beynim almıyordu, bu niye bana lazım olsun ki? Yani biliyomusun... anlamıyodum. Sonra bizi derslerden sonra da bırakıyolardı. Bizim zaten

Although she studied in the Turkish school, Ceren from Kyrgyzstan also pinpoints that the schools were introduced as international schools famous for the succesful multi-lingual education and technological advancements:

Ceren: Yes, I also studied in Turkish schools but I did not know that they were Turkish schools. Because it was presented as girls international high school. everybody knew how they provided with the very good education, very good moral education, that their [the students'] English is super, the lessons are in English, they receive certificate on computer skills, they are very successful when they graduate; the ninety percent of them receive scholarships. My parents sent me there because it was very popular<sup>42</sup>.

Albeit the obscure picturing of the movement, most of my participants described their strong feelings of trust and reliance on the teachers of Turkish schools:

Cemile: I came here with one of my friends, she also entered university. We did our registration but the courses did not start yet. We were wandering around, were going to market everyday were buying potato chips, etc. and were sitting in balcony on the 13th floor... We were sitting in the balcony and observing the evening Istanbul every evening. Well, we were not sure what was awaiting us, what was ahead because actually we trust our teachers in the Turkish schools very much. Well because we trusted them completely, we did not have any doubts, because we trusted them one hundred percent.<sup>43</sup>

### 2.3. “A woman with a cigarette”: Refracted image of Turkey

Different from the majority of the participants whom I intervieweed, Arzu from Kazakhstan expressed the anxiety of her parents about her decision to study in Turkey.

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8 saat dersimiz vardı ve sonrada etüt saatine kalmak zorundaydık. Ve bütün konular arkadaşlık olsun temizlik olsun bilmem ne olsun biliyomusun yavaş yavaş dine kayıyodu.

<sup>42</sup> Ceren: Evet ben de mesela türk okullarında okumuş ama onların türk okulu olduğunu hiç bilmiyordum. çünkü bizde sadece girls international high school diye geçiyor. herkese nasıl biliniyor işte çok iyi eğitim veriliyor iyi terbiye verilir ingilizceleri çok süper olur dersleri ingilizce alıyorlar bilgisayar sahip oluyorlar sertifikalı mezun oluyorlar derslerinde çok başarılı oluyorlar %90 işte burslu kazanıyorlar çok popüler olduğu için öyle göndermişler beni doğal olarak.

<sup>43</sup> Cemile: bir arkadaşla gelmiştim o da üniversiteyi kazandı. bir de mesela biz kayıtları yaptık ama okul başlamamıştı. Öyle dolanıp duruyorduk her gün markete gidiyorduk işte cips şu bu alırdık oturuyorduk balkon vardı üst kattaydı bi de 13 kat mıydı.. balkona çıkıyorduk akşamki istanbulu izliyorduk her gün öyle. yani *karşımızda ne olacağını emin değildik, ne çıkacağına neyle karşılaşacağımıza çok da şey değildik ama hani sonuçta türk okulundaki hocalarımıza çok güveniyorduk. hani onların güven altına girdiğimiz için hani böyle hiç bir şüpheye şeyimiz olmuyordu.. sonuçta hocanın söylediğine göre hani %100 inanıyorsun.*

According to her, Arzu's parents imagined Turkey as a Muslim country with radical groups and religious sects that would change her worldview and incorporate her in their radical movements. Similarly, her narrative falls in the framework of the modernist discourse but at the same time breaks with the chain of imagining Turkey as a safe place. In what follows, based on the narratives of my informants, I would like to draw attention to how the seemingly holistic and harmonious tableau changes or defracts with their arrival to Turkey or with their first confrontations with the *Hizmet* movement as a movement. For example, Cemile and Gülnur express the similar frustration regarding the universities they started attending in Turkey. Their expectations of the modern buildings with the innovative technology and equipments were not fulfilled:

Cemile: Our teacher was Kyrgyz but from a graduate from Turkey. she told us a lot; the messages are for free, we were sending each other messages instead of going to another room for tea. I was surprised how that might be. Because we did not have package, it was surprising for us, well I was wondering about small things like this messaging etc., otherwise, I was not even thinkign about Istanbul. I looked up my university in the internet and came across this historical building. I liked it very much, our university was soo beautiful. Then I came and came across this campus. I was expecting something more different, for example the first building of the university is not bad but our building is too much ancient artifact as it will fall down if you touch it. because of that I was very disappointed in the first year; the university has a name and nothing more. *But at first, for instance, you watch films, etc and everything is depicted very beautifully but it was not as I expected. But the people are warm here except some incidents in the buses and outside. On the other side it is not bad. Actually I am very satisfied that I came to Turkey.*<sup>44</sup> (my italics)

Gülnur: No, it was not difficult for me to adapt here but I was a little bit frustrated at the first day at university. Why? Because when I was coming to

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<sup>44</sup> Cemile: Bizim hocamız kırgızdı ama Türkiyeden mezun oldu. çok anlatırdı mesela msj hakkın bedava msjların oluyor bir odaya gidip söylemekten çay getir demektensen mesaj atıyorduk deyince ben böyle şaşıryordum acaba nasıl olur. çünkü bizde paket şeyi yoktu çok tuhafıma gidiyordu aa böyle hani hani mesela küçük şeyleri merak etmişim mesela işte mesaj atma falan şeyi yoksa istanbul sırf düşünme şeyim bile olmadı.çünkü internete baktım üniversiteye girdim şu tarihi bina çıktı karşıma çok da beğendim orayı aa bizim çok güzel bir üniversiteymiş. sonra geldim neyle karşılaştım bu kampus. (gülüyor) ben çok daha farklı bekliyordum mesela üniversitenin ilk binası fena değil ama bizimki şuanki bölümümüzün çok tarihi eser gibi bişey dokunsan dökülecek gibi (gülüyor). o yüzden ilk zamanda 1.sınıfta çok hayal kırıklığına uğramışım üniversitenin adı var başka da hiç bir şeyi yok diye. ama türkiyeyi başta hani mesela *filmlerde falan izliyorsun çok güzel gösteriyolar ama hani o kadar beklediğim gibi olmadı ama insanları sıcakkanlı bazı otobüsteki dışardaki olaylar hariç. obür türlü fena değil yani. aslında Türkiye'ye geldiğim için çok da memnunum.*

Turkey I had some expectations; we come from small towns and they are not developed as Istanbul. I was expecting our classrooms to be like in the films but when I arrived I entered an ordinary class with ordinary students. My coursemates were younger than me because I entered the university late. It seemed like an ordinary school. We spent overloaded days in the first year we learned we wandered around.<sup>45</sup>

Tracing the perceptions of these young women on Turkey and the movement I recognized the repeated image in several interviews. Two most powerful images that reshaped the underlying modernist image of Turkey is the image of the smoking woman and the image of the veiled woman. My interviewees were expressing disappointment, shock, uneasiness and threat at their first encounter with these two images after their arrival. Namely, these two images depict the rupture in their vision of Turkey and Turkish society. Their comprehension of Turkey had been constructed either via the *Cemaat* or via popular culture representations, most commonly the Turkish TV series that have become very popular recently in Central Asian countries. Gaye was talking about the movement's impression on her and then suddenly switched to the image that shocked her:

Gaye: I did not see bad sides when I first arrived. Even if I saw I did not keep them in my mind, I replaced them with the good things I saw. The surprising thing was the behaviour of people to each other, well, being disciplined. The behaviour of women and men to each other. I was impressed by this behaviour of people. They are very tolerant. It surprised me a lot. And yes the bad side that came to my mind, surprising thing, well, was women smoking cigarettes. I have not seen any woman smoking until then. When I came here, young ladies, high school girls everyone had cigarette in their hands. This surprised me a lot...<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Gülnur: Hayır benim buraya alışmam zor olmadı ama üniversite'deki ilk günde biraz hayal kırıklığına uğradım. Hangi açıdan? Yani Türkiye'ye gelerek, bir beklenti içindeydim çünkü ne de olsa bizim şehrimiz küçük ve biz İstanbul kadar gelişmiş değiliz ... *ben sınıfların filmlerdeki gibi olacağını bekliyordum ama buraya geldim sıradan bir sınıfa girdim, sıradan öğrenciler.* Ki benim sınıfımdakiler benden bir yaş küçüktü çünkü ben geç girdim üniversiteye. Ve bu sıradan bir okula benziyordu. Çok dolu günler geçiriyoduk biz derslere girip çıkıyorduk, birinci sınıftık hiç bişeyi bilmiyosun geziyosun öğreniyosun.

<sup>46</sup> Gaye: İlk geldiğimde kötü tarafları hiç görmedim. görmüşsem bile aklımda tutmadım demek kapatmışımdır iyi gördüklerimle. şaşırtan şeyler de insanların birbirine davranması hani böyle disiplinli olmaları. bayan ve erkeğin bir birine davranışı. hani insanların bana böyle davranmasından etkilenmişim. çok hoş görülüler. bu beni çok şaşırttı.. ve evet kötü tarafı da şu aklıma geldi. şaşırtan şey işte bayanların sigara kullanması. bu, ben orda hiç bu yaşına kadar bayanım bir sigara kullandığımı görmemişim. buraya gelince genç kızlar liseliler herkesin elinde sigara. çok şaşırttı beni...

Karanfil resonates her memories and feelings of how the connectedness and the sympathy towards Turkey and Turkish people in the following words:

Karanfil: Well, it is not choosing Turkey, it is feeling sympathy towards Turkey. For example, to feel sympathetic towards all people in Turkey. I guess because there were several Turkish teachers, everybody knows them. I was thinking that all Turks are like them. But it was not like it seemed to be. I was thinking that all Turks are very knowledgeable, that they do not sleep a lot. I was thinking they were very clever people but it was not like that at all.<sup>47</sup>

Later in our conversation she expressed her feeling of disconnectedness and alienation that came after her arrival. She also came across smoking women on the streets and could not built the same warm connection to Turkey as it was before. For her, Turkey was imagined as Anatolia and she could not attach the image of the smoking woman to Anatolia:

Karanfil: For instance I love people from Anatolia. I love them because these anatolian people went from the heart of Anatolia to open the schools, I love anatolian people. But now I m studying here in Turkey and I see that there is almost no Anatolian people left here. I met very strange people here sometimes. Yes, I thought that if every veiled one prays but I saw them smoking cigarettes. Very strange, shocking.<sup>48</sup>

The image of Turkey as a safe place is shaken as they start seeing “different” faces of Turkey.

Cemile: I was surprised at girls freely smoking cigarettes. For our culture it is unusual. In our culture you will not seen anyone lie this outside, except the Russian. You will not see the Kyrgyz smoking cigarettes. If you see it you can come across just 1 % in the capital city, well you will not come

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<sup>47</sup> Karanfil: Türkiye’yi seçmek değil de hani Türkiye’ye sempati duymak gibi bişey diyelim hani. Mesela, *tüm Türkiye’nin insanlarına sempati duymak*. Sanıyordum ki orda bir kaç tane Türk hocalarımız vardı hani zaten herkes de biliyor hocaların olduğunu. Hani *sanıyordum ki tüm Türk insanları öyle* diye. Ama öyle değilermiş çok böyle farklılarmış. Ben hani sanıyordum ki tüm Türkler bilgililer, çok uyumazlar. Hani ne bilim çok zeki insanlar olduğunu sanıyordum ama öyle değilmiş yani.

<sup>48</sup> Karanfil: Mesela anadolu insanını çok severim. çok seviyorum çünkü onlar hepsi şey anadolu insanı zaten okullar açmak için de anadolunun bağrından gitmişler ya, çok severim anadolu insanını. ama bakıyorum burda Türkiye’de okuyorum anadolu insanı nerdeyse hiç kalmamış yani. bazen oluyor yani çok tuhaf insanlarla karşılaştığım zamanlar oldu. Evet, sanıyordum ki kapalı herkes kapalı herkes namaz kılıyodur diye bir baktım kapalı sigara içiyor. çok tuhaf şoktaydım öyle.

across. Even in the villages people hide and smoke, you will not see them smoking. Here everyone smokes veiled, not veiled, aunts, the old ones, the young ones... what is this comfort! You can count the non-smokers in my class. It is very common here... I don't know... anyway the smoking does not suit anyone especially ladies.<sup>49</sup>

The woman symbolically becomes the representation of Turkey and separating element between the movement and Turkey as a whole. This threatening image of woman also serves as a factor keeping the followers within the boundaries of the movement, within the boundaries of moral principles. By expressing their anxiety and confusion they also express their reasoning to hold on to the movement more tightly: the life outside the movement is dangerous and full of sins. Gülnur who left the movement because of her boyfriend (now her husband) shares her thoughts on the difference between the followers in the movement and other people in Turkey.

Gülnur: When we were studying there were very few students coming from Europe. Lets start from this, usually [students] from Central Asia come here. Very few people come here from Europe... and everyone after the arrival is directly placed in *Hizmet*. Our environment, our first communication networks was *Hizmet*. Well, all our thoughts were shaped by *Hizmet*, do you get it, religion, religion and so on. Because of that we did not talk to the Europeans a lot, because their life style is totally different. They came here and communicated with modern Turks, because they could drink alcohol and have fun with them. They could have fun in any ways ... our communication was limited. We just met those who were introduced to us. Usually, when you leave [the community], for example, when I started working, I did not meet people from *Hizmet*. I saw different Turks, the Turks with different ways of life. Do you get it, I was going to fairs and I was meeting different friends with different life styles, I was meeting the Europeans. And *from that moment we change. And my viewpoint about Hizmet about everything changed. These are totally two different things...* It can no be compared. Those coming from Europe are talking with Turks, of course. They are friendly but they are meeting with different types of Turks, with Turks that not only think about religion but also love having fun, those

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<sup>49</sup> Cemile: Şaşırmıştım. *Kızların rahatlıkla sigara içmesine*. Yani bizim kültür açımızdan değişik birşey. Bizim ülkede mesela birisini dışarda ruslar haricinde öyle görmezsin. Bir kırgızın oturup sigara içtiğini. Ama görürsen de mesela hani çok çok işte belki başkentte %1 karşılaşılabirsin o da yok yani karşılaşmazsın. Köylerde falan olsa bile aşırı derece saklanıp içiliyor, içtiği görüldü mü yok yani. Burda mesela kapalı mı olsun açık mı olsun teyzesimi yaşlısı mı genci mi... Bu ne rahatlık! Sınıfımda içmeyenleri sayarsın böyle kim içmiyormuş diye. Çok doğal... ne kadar.. bilmiyorum... zaten sigara içmek kimseye yakışmıyor kaldı ki bayanlara diye düşünüyorum. **Cemile**

who are open to everything, let me say open-minded. Yes, they communicate just with them.<sup>50</sup>

Although, Gülnur left the movement years ago, for her it is still “a most convenient” place for the women students from Central Asia. Based on the instances where the students mention about the disturbing image of a smoking woman, I argue that the *Hizmet* movement’s image of being “safe” and “protective” remains unshattered and even strengthened.

On the other side, my informant from Kazakhstan, Arzu, who without any knowledge about the movement beforehand spent more than a year in Cemaat’s housing and dormitory, said that she felt very strange at the sight of covered women in Turkey:

**How did you imagine Turkey when you were in Kazakhstan?**

Arzu: As in series, as in Turkish series. I thought everything is civilized as in series.

**What series did you watch?**

Arzu: I did not watch Turkish series I just saw them several times. Everyone is watching Turkish series in Kazakhstan. And you see it whether you like it or not. They seemed more civilized there. When I arrived in Turkey, I felt very strange because everyone was veiled, every girl was veiled, it was too much. But in series there is no one [veiled].<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup>Gülnur: Biz okuduğumuz zaman Avrupa’dan çok az öğrenci geliyordu. Şundan başlayalım buraya genellikle Orta Asya’dan geliyolar. Avrupa’dan çok az insan geliyo.. ve onların hepsi yani biz buraya geldiğimiz zaman biz direk *Hizmete* yerleşiyoduk. Bizim ortamımız bizim ilk iletişim ağlarımız *Hizmetti*. Yani bizim bütün düşüncelerimiz *Hizmetle* şekilleniyodu, anlıyomusun, din din ve ona benzer şeyler. O yüzden biz Avrupalılarla çok konuşmuyoduk. Çünkü *onların yaşam tarzı tamamen farklıydı*. Onlar geliyolardı ve çağdaş türklerle takılıyodu, onlarla içki içip gezebiliyodular çünkü. Onlar hem kapalı hem açık gezebiliyodu çünkü.. yani bizim iletişimimiz kısıtlıydı. Bize kimi gösterecek onu görüyoduk. Ve doğal olarak sen ordan çıktığın zaman, mesela ben çalışmaya başladığım zaman ben *Hizmetten* insanlarla karşılaşmıyodum. *Ben bambaşka Türkleri gördüm*, tamamen farklı hayat tarzı olan türkleri. Anlıyomusun fuarlara gidiyodum farklı hayat tarzı, farklı arkadaşları farklı hayat standartları olan Avrupalıları görüyodum. Ve o andan itibaren hepimiz değişiyoruz. Ve *benim Hizmete olan bakışım da değişti herşey değişti. Tamamen 2 farklı şey..* karşılaştırılmaz. Avrupadan gelenler tabii ki de yine Türklerle konuşuyolar onlar çok sıcakkanlıdı, ama onlar farklı tip Türklerle karşılaşıyolar. Yani sadece dini düşünen türklerle değil, gezmeyi seven, herşeye daha açık bakan, açık fikirli diyelim, evet sadece onlarla iletişim kuruyolar...

<sup>51</sup> **Kazakistan’da iken Türkiye’yi nasıl hayal ediyordun?**

Arzu: Dizilerdeki gibi, Türk dizilerindeki gibi. Herkesin medeni olduğunu düşünüyodum dizideki gibi.

**Hangi dizileri izliyodun?**



In both contradicting accounts, the image of Turkey is embodied in the image of a woman. Although these two cases seem different from each other, they overlap in the modernist discourse that underlies them. While on the one side there is a woman who is described (by my informants) as “deviant” and too “free”, the other woman is “entrapped” and “enslaved” in traditions.

#### 2.4. Developing National(ist) Muslim Consciousness

Many of my participants talked extensively about “growing up” or “maturing” and obtaining a particular consciousness after they arrived in Turkey. Scholars analysing the movement observe the main motivation of the movement both to consolidate modest Islam and to propagate Turkism (Balcı 2011, Turam 2003, 2007). Balcı argues that while in state schools, students learned their Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek or Turkmen identities intensively, cemaat schools promoted Uzbek and Turk, Kazakh and Turk or Turkmen and Turk identities (2011: 166). In this vein, the historical and cultural ties between the Turks living in Anatolia and “the Turks” living in Central Asia were emphasized and idealized in the narratives of my participants.

Melisa, whom I met several times to interview, was very active in the university social activities and mentioned the extracurricular activities she together with the other international students organized. She constantly invited me to participate and become a member of the club they established. Although, this club is organized at the university where she studies and is not related to the movement, the vision and mission of the club is very similar to the discourse of the movement. The club activities as she defined them aim to:

Melisa: *To introduce our differences, to come together and to state that we are this.* We always talk about our aims when we come together. It is not like let’s go partying or let’s go to picnic or do this or that in a mixed group of girls and boys. It is to become united in a social cultural and economic ways<sup>52</sup>.

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Arzu: ben Türk dizilerini izlemiyodum sadece gördüm bir kaç kez, Kazakistan’da herkes Türk dizilerini izliyo. Sen de ister istemez görüyorsun. Ve orda çok *daha kültürlü gibiydiler*. Ben buraya geldiğimde *çok tuhaf bir his yaşadım çünkü herkes kapalıydı, bütün kızlar kapalıydı çok fazlaydı*. Dizilerde ise hiç yok.

<sup>52</sup> Melisa: *farklılıklarımızı bir tanıtalım biz biraz böyleyiz demek ve biraraya gelmek biraraya gelince amaçlarımızdan sürekli bahsediyoruz şöyle böyle. kız erkek karışık*

Even outside the movement activities, Melisa uses the language of *Cemaat*. She paraphrases the ethnic nationalism discourse of the movement through her activities and practices. She argues that the activities of the club and interaction with the people from different ethnic and national groups raised her awareness: “mesela, önceden haberlere bakarken bakıp geçiyordum ama bugünlerde orta afrikada hristiyanlar müslümanlara eziyet falan ediyor, arkadaşları aradım geçmiş olsun falan diyorum artık ilgileniyorum. çoğu ülkelerele ilgileniyorum Kenya var Tanzanya”. She describes the activities she conducts in the club as a kind of mission or duty, and does not want it to be trivialized as hobby or entertainment.

Feride, a student from Kazakhstan, identified herself as Meskhetian Turk and told me about her family’s forced migration from their land. After her arrival in Turkey she got acquainted with several students of Meskhetian origin and organized theatres and activities to remember the victims of the displacement. For her, Turkey was a second motherland and a place where she could find her roots because she reached the brother of her grandmother – who were separated during the displacement – and his family. In her narrative, she underscored the significance of being aware of the national and ethnic roots, of not losing the unity.

In like manner, Yağmur underscores the importance of nationalist awareness for the development of nation-states. She compares the nationalist projects in her country to Atatürk’s projects:

Yağmur: We were just out of Soviet system in Turkmenistan and Turkmenistan aimed to raise consciousness of the nation. For example, in the first years the book Rukhnama is published. Actually, I say, it is good that it was published because the nation state should pass through some stages. We were russified in the Soviet times, we did not know anything about us. Basically, we did not know where the turkmen ancestry comes from but then the Soviets fell down, we had our president and wrote a book. At the beginning it seemed very utopic for me, but now I understand that it should be this way. You definitely should form a nation state to develop. Because the nation should acknowledge itself. It should claim I am turkmen or I am Uzbek, whatever. What was it before? Our parents said I am Russian or I am Soviet and so on. This should happen. Here, in Turkey, also they continue to teach Atatürk’s principles and history of Turkish revolution.

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*hadi pikniğe gidelim hadi parti yapalım hadi bunu yapalım değil sosyal kültürel ekonomik yönde biraraya gelme ilk başta bir birimizle biraz birlik olmak.*

They say we should develop according to Atatürk's principles, right? Well, this should happen until some time...<sup>53</sup>

Her nationalist accent converges with Gülen's view of activism and *Hizmet*. Gülen is very supportive of simultaneous localization and globalization of the movement:

Yağmur: What was the concept that was developed in parallel or at the same time with globalisation? Generalization, in other words, territorialization. That is to say, the strengthening and speeding up of local cultures, do you get it? But at the same time we are living in a global village, everyone is in interaction; thus, knowing Russian language and culture is not a bad thing. Just you should know the limits or you should use it without doing harm to your nation. Publishing of Rukhnama or awakening of Turkmen soul is a good thing not a bad thing.<sup>54</sup>

What is more, Yağmur emphasized how she was indifferent to the teachings of Rukhnama<sup>55</sup> and failed university exams because of insufficient knowledge of it. Interestingly, she narrated how she became more aware of her national identity in Turkey:

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<sup>53</sup> Yağmur: Türkmenistan'da zaten Sovyetlerden yeni çıkmışız ne bileyim işte Türkmenistan kendi halkını biliçlendirme amacındaydı ki ilk yıllarda mesela ruhnama kitabı çıkıyor, iyi ki de çıktı diyorum açıkçası çünkü ulus devlet dediğin şey açıkçası bazı aşamalardan geçmek zorunda. Hah, biz sovyetler zamanında baya ruslaşmıştık hiç bir şeyimizi bilmiyorduk. En temel, türkmen soyu nerden geldiğini bilmiyorduk ama hani sovyetler yıkıldı başımıza cumhurbaşkanı geldi, kitap yazdı hani. Başta bana hani çok utopik gelirdi bu konular ama gittikçe anlıyorum ki olması gerekiyor bazı yerlerde. Kesinlikle olacak çünkü ulus devleti yaratacağsın ki sen kalkınabilmen için. Çünkü millet kendini bilecek. Ha ben türkmenim diyecek ya da artık her neyse yada hani ben özbeğim diyecek. Ondan önce neydi, bizim ana babalarımız ne yapıyor ben rusum derlerdi ya da ben sovyetlerden gelme birşeyim derdi. O tarz şeyler olacak. Ha burda da aynı şekilde türkiyede de atatürk inkılap tarihi falan var hala da öğretiliyor hala da veriliyor. Olacak diyor demi tamamen kalkınacağsın diyo Atatürk'ün şeyi ilkelerine göre kalkınacağsın diyo e o var olması gerekiyor zaten bir yere kadar.

<sup>54</sup> Yağmur: Aynı anda küreselleşmeye paralel olarak yada bizzat olarak ne gibi bir kavram geliştirmişlerdi? Genelleşme yani bölgeselleşme yani daha çok yerel kültürlerin hız kazanması güç kazanması anlatabiliyormuyum? Ama aynı anda da biz bi küresel köy onun içerisindeyiz herkes etkileşim halinde o yüzden rusçayı bilmek dilibilmek kültürü bilmek kötübişey değil sadece bunu haddini bilerek mi ne desem artık yada kendi milletine zarar vermicek şekilde elde tutacağsın. Ha bir ruhnamanın yazılması yada türkmen ruhunun uyandırılması iyi bir şey kötü birşey değil.

<sup>55</sup> Rukhnama is a book written by the first president of Turkmenistan, Saparmyrat Niyazov, in 2001. It was taught as a compulsory lessons in schools and other educational institutions. The book aimed to contribute and to consolidate the national projects initiated by Niyazov.

Yağmur: Frankly speaking, I did not know a lot about Turkey. Yet more, when I arrived they said that Central Asian countries are Turkic countries, that we have the same root coming from Seldjuk state. Well, this is right but I did not know it, I learned it after my arrival. Sometimes I found it strange but then I understood that it is true. We have the same root, the common root, but this does not mean that Turkmenistan and Turkey are the same.<sup>56</sup>

On the other side, Gülnur, who is married and lives in Turkey for about 8 years, believes that the Central Asian students living and studying in Ukraine, Russia and Belarus adapt to the environment and “mentality” in their home country easier than the students studying in Turkey. She draws attention, like Gaye, to the notion of “Islamic” culture and country. In her interview she constantly reminded that “they” – the students in other countries- are morally “lost”; conversely, “we” - the students in Turkey – know our boundaries and learn who “we” are, “we” become conscious of our (Muslim and Turkic) identity:

Gülnur: Let me tell you something. It is much easier to return back to Turkmenistan for those who are studying in Ukraine or Belorussia... why? Because everything is based on money there. If you are studying in private university you pass your exams with money. There is no such intense studies as here... and these countries are living according to the principles of our country.. However, when you arrive here, you meet with more conscious muslim people who know their religion. Because when I arrived here, I was not [...] of course, I was claiming that I am Muslim but there was nothing behind these words. I was not fasting, I was doing nothing, but here they are more conscious... there they are drinking [alcohol], they are having fun.. they are living according to those principles. Thus, when you go back home you easily adapt there... but here everything is according to rules.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Yağmur: Şimdi çok fazla bir şey bilmiyordum Türkiye hakkında açık konuşmak gerekirse, hatta şuraya geldiğimde burda dediler ki işte orta asya ülkeleri Türki cumhuriyetlerdir, hepimizin kökümüz aynı ee selçuk devletinin elinden ee doğru ben bunu bilmiyordum mesela açıkçası ben buraya gelip öğrendim. Bazı yerlerde garipsedim ama sonunda anlıyorsun evet tabii öyleymiş bazı yerlerde yani kökümüz var, ortak kökümüz var nasıl olsa da ama hani bu şey anlamına gelmiyor türkmenistan türkiye ile aynı.

<sup>57</sup> Gülnur: Ben sana bir şeyi söyleyim, ukrayna veya beyaz rusyada okuyanlar için türkmenistana geri dönmek çok daha kolay... neden mi? Çünkü oralarda da herşeye para üzerine kurulu, sen özel üniversitede okuyosan sınavlarını da parayla geçersin. Orda burdaki gibi yoğun eğitim yok... ve o ülkeler bizim ülkenin prensiplerine göre yaşıyor... buraya geldiğindeyse *daha bilinçli bir müslüman halkla karşılaşıyorsun, kendi dinini tanıyan halkla*. Çünkü ben buraya geldiğimde *ben kendi dinimi, tabii ben müslümanım diyodum ama bu kelimenin arkası boştu, arkasında hiç bişey yoktu. Ne oruç tutuyordu ne başka bişey, hiiç bişey burdaysa daha bilinçli.. orada ise içmeler gezmeler tozmalar.*

Like other interviewees, Nazlı also pointed to the history of Turkey while telling about her experience:

Nazlı: I came here and learned Ottoman history. I was very much impressed. I do not know whether you read it or not but Ottoman history, it was such beautiful times. I see Turkey as the heir of those times. And, of course, the Balkans, most of those territories were the Ottoman; however, I see Turkey as the grandchildren of Ottoman. I see it as a country that lives according to Islam and fights for Islam. It went through difficult times after the fall of the Ottoman [...] I see it as a country that goes through hard times and rises again. The country we can see as an example. There were crises in all over the world, in Europe, in other countries [...] Turkey was not affected by these crises. We can take the military of Turkey as an example as well. I know that it is as powerful as Russia.

### **Military?**

Nazlı: The military structure defines the power of a country and I assume that when the military of a state is powerful then it is powerful in other spheres as well. I see Turkey in this way. Well, as I stated before here, I learned Islam here because of that this place is very important for me. My friends who taught me Islam, may God bless them, if I stayed there [ at home country] I would never have learned it. because of that my home country is always at the first place. However, I can stay in every country [...] but I love my country at the first place. I can stay in every country but not as much as my home country. What is special about Turkey is that I learned Islam here.<sup>58</sup>

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Böyle prensiplerle yaşıyorlar. O yüzden sen Ukrayna'dan evine Türkmenistan'a döndüğün zaman çok daha kolay adapte olabiliyosun.. burdaysa herşey kuralına göre..

<sup>58</sup> Nazlı: Şuan ben buraya geldim Osmanlı tarihini okudum. çok etkilendim. sen okudun mu bilmiyorum ama Osmanlı tarihi o kadar güzel bir zamanmış ki. o zamandan kalan insanlar olarak görüyorum şuan Türkiye'yi ve tabii Balkanlar da o taraflarda çoğu yer Osmanlı'nın dı ama Osmanlı'nın çocukları torunları olarak Türkiye'yi görüyorum. İslam yoluyla giden onun üzerine mücadele eden ülke olarak görüyorum ve baya zor zamanlar Osmanlı yıkıldıktan sonra [...] gene zor zamanlar geçirmiş Türkiye'ye bir şekilde mücadele ederek Türkiye'ye gene ayağa kalkan bir ülke olarak görüyorum. örnek alabileceğimiz bir ülke. mesela şeyler oldu kriz oldu tüm ülkelerde tüm dünyada Avrupada da. [...] kriz olduğu zaman tr etkilenmedi mesela. o şekilde de örnek alabiliriz hem askeri açısından askeri yapımı da çok iyi diye biliyorum Rusya kadar iyidir.

### **Askeri taraftan?**

Nazlı: Hani bir ülkenin gücünü askeri yapımı ve şeyden belli oluyor ya askeri taraftan güçlü olan ülke de diğer taraflardan da güçlü olarak sayıyorum ben. öyle görüyorum şuan tr. şöyle *burda dediğim gibi daha önce de bahsettiğim gibi İslamı öğrendim o yüzden benim için burası çok önemli* bana İslamı öğreten arkadaşlarım Allah onlardan razı olsun belki orda kalırsam öğrenmezdim o yüzden kendi vatanım ilk olarak her zaman öndedir 1. ama her ülkede kalabilirim burası da [...] ama memleketimi ilk olarak çok severim memleketimdir çünkü diğer ülkeler kalabileceğim yerler ama

Both Gülnur's and Nazlı's words remind me of the movement's claim to fill "the identity gap" in the post-Soviet space via educational activities. Obvious similarities can be detected in the informants' accounts and Gülen's utterances about the "lost generations" in Central Asia:

The wiggles in the Central Asia are the awakening moves of the nation that lost its soul for several decades and was torn into pieces. At the moment, these blessed people struggle to be themselves by recognizing their enemies who ruptured their life-bloods, who sucked their blood out, by tearing down the chains they wore on their shoulders. Acknowledging the current and former enemies who threatened their existence and who dried up the sap of life during the decades, preparing to come to terms with them in a proper way and passing to a metaphysical dimension on the way to doomsday in this struggle is a significant step. Only if these people lead their existential fight with logic and reasoning by trusting Allah and taking into consideration the strong and superior sides of their enemies, will they be able to overcome their nightmares, will they develop their national soul and character, will they join among the world heirs.<sup>59</sup>

As Ahiska would interpret these, I also argue that "[t]he stagnant past is revisited in the light of the urgency of choosing a future" (2003: 355) in the above-written narratives.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I focused on the women students' perceptions with regard to Turkey and to the movement before and after their arrival. I mainly explored how the

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memleketimin yeri kadar değil ama türkiye'nin özelliği de bana islamı öğretmiş islamı öğrenmem burda. **Nazlı**

<sup>59</sup> Orta Asya'daki kıpırdanışlar, birkaç asırdan beri rûhunu yitirmiş, paramparça olmuş bir milletin yeniden diriliş hareketleridir. Bu mübârek topluluk şu anda, can damarını koparan, kanını emen hasımlarını tanıma, bir esaret tasması gibi boynunda taşıdığı zincirleri kırma ve özüyle bütünleşip "kendi olma" mücâdelesini vermektedir. Bu mücâdele ve onun stratejisi ne seviyede olursa olsun, onun, asırlar boyu varlığını tehdit eden ve bütün hayat kaynaklarını kurutan dünkü ve bugünkü düşmanlarını sezip anlaması, usûlünce onlarla hesaplaşmaya hazırlanması ve bir büyük hesap günü için tam bir metafizik gerilime geçmesi bu mevzûda çok önemli bir adım sayılabilir. Şayet, bu ülke insanları, hasımlarının kuvvet ve üstün yanlarını da hesaba katarak, Allah'a güvenir ve bu yeniden varoluş kavgalarını akıl, mantık ve muhâkeme çerçevesinde sürdürebilirlerse, şu bir-iki asırlık kâbusları aşabilir; millî ruh ve millî seciyeleri dahilinde yükselir ve geleceğin dünyâ emânetçileri arasına girebilirler. Gülen, F. (1990) Milli Öfke in Sızıntı, 142. Retrieved from: <http://www.sizinti.com.tr/konular/ayrinti/milli-ofke.html>

students' perceptions of Turkey (mainly constructed by their acquaintance with the movement) have affected their choices of university education. After narrative analysis I elaborated on the modernist discourse reflected in the narratives of my participants with the specific focus on the occidentalist perceptions of Turkey. I argued that this occidentalist perception is not independent from the *Hizmet* movement's activities abroad. Moreover, I suggested that the movement and the relationships constructed within it assist in forming a holistic image of Turkey that ruptures after the arrival of the students to Turkey and their interaction with the world outside boundaries of the *Hizmet* movement. I observed two main trends in the perceptions of Turkey in my interviewees' motivation to apply to Turkish universities. First, the image of Turkey as a modern and developed country, claiming its "place" in European Union, frequently emerged as an encouraging impulse to obtain university education in Turkey. Second, the (gendered) notion of safety and protection has been underlined by many of my research participants while narrating the reasons for choice of Turkey. These two images – "safe" and "modern/civilized" Turkey have gone through some transformations after the arrival of the students in Turkey. It is important to remember that the students' perceptions of Turkey and the movement were interrelated and interchangeable before their arrival. However, after their arrival the main point of deformation in the picturing of Turkey and the movement as one entity occurred in the discourse of safety. While the *Hizmet* movement still is imagined as "safe" (for women students), Turkey is not as "safe" as it seemed to be before arrival. Moreover, in this chapter, I scrutinized the nationalist inclinations in the stories of my participants. Most of my participants narrated about becoming aware of their national identities as Turkmen, Kazakh or Kyrgyz after their arrival to Turkey.

### CHAPTER 3: “SHE IS LIKE OF THE SAME BLOOD”: *HİZMET* HOUSING AND CONSTRUCTION OF FICTIVE KINSHIP TIES

The concept of “brotherhood” has been used widely to define the central organizing principle of the Gülen community and the relationship among its members both by scholars, and by the sympathizers of the movement and Gülen himself. Uğur Kömeçoğlu has underlined the significance of the fraternity relationships at the level of conversion to the movement:

[...] what is crucial in the movement is the centrality of close interpersonal bonds in the *conversion* process. We should remember that action is inseparable from "micro-level relations at the grassroots". The conversion into *jamaat* is provided by the *fraternization* process first exemplified by the young Gülen. The sense of trust, closeness, friendship, sincerity and brotherhood are the forms of social intercourse which are attractive for audiences. (italics of the author, Kömeçoğlu 1997: 68)

Kömeçoğlu states that these relationships take the respondents to the “sacred-private domain” of the movement (1997: 69). Yet, in his broad conceptualization of fraternity relationships, Kömeçoğlu pays no attention to the continuation of these relationships in the student housings and takes these relationships solely as media for the conversion process. Moreover, he directly equates fraternity to “brotherhood” and ignores the gendered aspect of these relationships. In this research, my aim has been to move beyond this limited conceptualization and explore the gendered relationship between women affiliates, as well as between men and women. Discussing the ambiguity of these relationships (Vicini 2013: 386), I argue that the term “religious fraternity” remains limited to conceptualize these relationships. I suggest that *Hizmet* housing is one of the central sites where *fictive kin relations* are established and consolidated and that the gender segregated, homosocial characteristic of this site of communal living and interaction underlines the significance of gender in our analysis of



the *Hizmet* community. The kin terms like *abla* (sister), *abi* (brother) or *ev annesi* (mother of the house) are extensively used in the *Hizmet* community<sup>60</sup>. Although my research has been limited to the physical space of *Hizmet* student housing, there are other venues and spaces where these relationships have been sustained and consolidated, such as digital spaces that have played a crucial role in the globalization of these relationships (including the increasingly popular social media).

If gender and student housing constitute understudied sites for the *Hizmet* movement, another aspect of the movement that calls for more research is its transnational character. How are transnational relationships conceptualized and practiced in the global *Hizmet* community? What kind of role do kin terms play in these conceptualizations? What other terms are used? In the case of the students from the Central Asia, the kin relationships are sustained through the common historical and cultural past of Turkic cultures and the Islam religion. From the days of my affiliation I remember one of the *ablas* calling us – all international students – *muhacirs*. The *muhacir-ensar*<sup>61</sup> story has been extensively used in the movement's literature to describe the mobilization of the disciples from Turkey to other parts of the world. The followers' migration to other countries with the purpose of serving the movement has been called *hicret*<sup>62</sup> and they themselves have been referred to as *muhacirs*. However, in everyday conversations, the international students in Turkey have also been called *muhacirs*, which consequently positions the followers in Turkey as hosts, as *ensars*. The centrality of becoming one family in the *muhacir-ensar* story is extensively emphasized in the discourse of the movement. In this chapter, I explore the gendered nature of the kin relationships that constitute the *Hizmet* community and the familial concepts that the movement utilizes to breed relationships within its own (public) spaces.

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<sup>60</sup> The fact that these kin terms are commonly used in Turkey can not be ignored. However, I will discuss the specificity of these terms and relationships in the context of *Hizmet* community.

<sup>61</sup> The term *muhacir – ensar* fraternity is based on a story of migration of Muslim families from Mekkah to Medine dating back to times of prophet Muhammed. According to Islamic resources, after *muhacir* families (immigrants) arrived to Medine, prophet Muhammed bonded 45 families of *muhacirs* with 45 families of *ensar* (hosts) and announced them kins.

<sup>62</sup> *Hicret* means migration with the purpose of spreading the word of Allah.

Unlike the experiences of other *muhacir* women in the movement – i.e. those who left Turkey to perform *hizmet* abroad – my participants have migrated right into the “heart” of *Hizmet*. My research focuses on how the Central Asian female students integrate into the fictive family of the *Hizmet* community and how they themselves define and experience the relationships in this community. Throughout their accounts, the young women I interviewed described their relationships with *ablas* and other people in the movement through friendship/comradeship, as well as in kinship terms. It is important to note that these relationships are constructed through time and (homosocial) space. In what follows, based on in-depth interviews with students and former students from Central Asia, I scrutinize the inner dynamics of these relationships and seek the answers to the following questions: How do these female students identify the movement and the community of which they have been a part? How do they identify and perceive their position in the big family of *Hizmet*? And what do these identifications (or their lack) tell us about the gendered making of the transnational *Hizmet* community? In this part I will explore how the *Hizmet* housing serves as a major site in the construction, reproduction and negotiation of the fictive kinship ties that are central to the migration of women university students from Central Asia in the *Hizmet* community in Turkey. First, I discuss how the relationships of women participants and their experiences are integrated into the scholarly literature and how this part of my research aims to contribute to this literature. Further, I explore the homosociality of these relationships and how this homosociality is supported through the warm environment of the student housing. In the following sections I argue that the student housing does not only serve as a space for socializing and consolidating the kin relationships but is also a site for learning and performing *Hizmet*.

### 3.1. Brotherhood or Family?

In the 22. *Mektup* (the Twenty Second Letter ) of his work *Mektubat*<sup>63</sup>, also known as *Uhuvvet Risalesi* (“Brotherhood Treatise”) Said Nursi invites all the believers

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<sup>63</sup> *Mektubat* is one of the volumes of *Risale-i Nur* (Epistles of Light) collection, a six thousand page commentary on the Qur’an written by Bediüzzaman Said Nursi. This collection is very central in the teaching of proper Muslim conduct in the movement. The first *Hizmet* housings (formerly called *Işık evleri* meaning “houses of light”) were established from the reading circles of *Risale-i Nur*. Gülen gives significant place to references from Said Nursi both in his sermons and writings.

(*ehl-iman*) to *muhabbet* (love) and *uhuvvet*<sup>64</sup> (brotherhood). As Yılmaz and Çakır claim, this brotherhood goes beyond familial and ethnic (or racial) ties (2008). Moreover, according to Yılmaz and Çakır, it is different from religious fraternity that constitutes only the members of a certain religion; it is an eternal brotherhood of souls (of every person of faith) not of bodies (ibid). Gülen frequently refers to this treatise in his writings and sermons drawing on the Prophet Muhammed's and his companions' (Sahabe) relationships as "real" *kardeşlik*<sup>65</sup>. Although the original term *kardeşlik* is not genderless in the context of "religious fraternity", I prefer using it instead of its English translation as "brotherhood". Gülen underlines the importance of reviving of these relationships and sustains these relationships as a model for living and performing *Hizmet* together. Before exploring the nature of these relationships, I would like to remind about the self-definition of the movement as a social network rather than a religious "brotherhood". The community rejects to be called *cemaat* as it has a derogative association with radical religious movements/sects. Particularly in the international arena it draws an image of a big transnational family rather than of "brotherhood". The community's public (cultural) events such as Turkish Olympiads or World Mother's Day<sup>66</sup> also served to consolidate this image. My participants also referred to the community as a family to which most of them would like to be linked for the rest of their lives. Therefore, in this chapter I would like to analyze the nature of the imagined kin relationships from the Central Asian women university student's perspective.

### 3.2. Networking and Socializing in the *Hizmet* Housing

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<sup>64</sup> *Uhuuvvet* comes from the same roots as the Arabic words "ahî" or "ihvan" and in general means "brotherhood, fraternity".

<sup>65</sup> For Gülen's thoughts on *kardeşlik* see: Gülen, F. (2007) *Kardeşlik anlayışımız nasıl olmalıdır? İçinde bulunduğumuz durumla alakalı bir değerlendirme yapar mısınız? Asrın Getirdiği Tereddütler*. Işık Yayıncılık; Gülen, F. (2009) *Kıyam ve Kardeşlik*. Retrieved from: [http://tr.fgulen.com/index2.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=17960&pop=1&page=0&Itemid=3](http://tr.fgulen.com/index2.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=17960&pop=1&page=0&Itemid=3); Gülen (1990) *Kardeşlik Destanı* (Hisar Cami Vaazı).

<sup>66</sup> I will discuss these events later.

The Gülen community's housing system comes from *Nur* communities' tradition of reading circles<sup>67</sup>. The community provides university students with the safe and protective environment to study and perform their religious practices. The *Hizmet* housings have been primarily the places where the Islamic practices have been conducted and where the reading of *Risale-i Nur* collection considered one of the main practices. There are six or seven residents in each of the student apartments. One of these students is assigned as a supervisor and called *ev ablası/abisi* (sister/brother of the house). *Ev ablası* is also a university student, usually a second or third year student, who is in charge of the student housing. *Ev ablası* is expected to build warm interpersonal relationships with the inhabitants of the housing and keep track of their personal, spiritual development. Extra attention is paid to conducting prayers and reciting the rosary after the evening prayers. Every evening there is *çay saati* (tea hour) during which the senior member or *abla* of the house delivers *sohbet* (sermon), reads Qur'an loudly or everyone listens to a sermon by Gülen on DVDs or CDs. Moreover, *tea hours* continue with a sharing of the daily experiences at university and more casual conversations. There are no complex lessons of Qur'an or of other theological texts apart from reading *Risale-i Nur*, Gülen's and his disciples' writings (Vicini 2013: 385). From time to time, there are organized camps of reading *Risale-i Nur* and travels to different cities of Turkey. The community also organizes settings for international students to celebrate their national holidays or special events in their home countries.

I was invited to one such celebration of *Nowruz*<sup>68</sup> organized by both Kyrgyz and Turkmen women affiliates of the community during my fieldwork. The celebration was set in one of the halls of the community's institution. When I arrived, the national meals were about to be served. The Turkmen and the Kyrgyz music were playing in the background. All of the attendees were dressed in a festive mood and there was a holiday atmosphere. As I realized later, I was not the only guest from outside of the community in the hall. They had invited some other Kyrgyz and Turkmen women students who were not the affiliates of the community but stayed in state dormitories. Excessive attention and care was paid to all of the guests/non-affiliates. Two *ablas* (originally

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<sup>67</sup> There are several branches of *Nur* community like Readers' group, Writers' group or New Asia group, etc. Gülen community also comes from the tradition of *Nurculuk*.

<sup>68</sup> *Nowruz* is a first day of spring in Persian calendar and marked as a beginning of a year. It is widely celebrated in Central Asia, Azerbaijan and Caucasus. Retrieved from: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nowruz>

from Turkey) left right after the celebration started. The past birthdays of the girls (one a newcomer and another a non-affiliate of the community) were also congratulated with gifts and birthday cakes. The national dances and the singings followed the meal. These kind of events and socializing are quite effective for the movement's recruitment of new students and for establishing an image of non-constraining comfortable environment. Leaving of the more senior *ablas* at the beginning of the festivity relaxed the students even more. This reminded me of Kandiyoti's conceptualization of sex-segregated societies:

In sex-segregated societies, women's parallel networks of sociability are highly articulated and involve structured visiting patterns, specific forms of religious and ritual participation, as well as specified forms of group entertainment. A lot of self-expressive activity takes place within single-sex groups (such as singing, dancing, and joking), and women do not depend exclusively or primarily on men for their self-definition (Kandiyoti 1987: 329).

Although, the women's side of the movement are not completely independent from the men's side, I would agree with Kandiyoti on the presence of "self-expressive activities" that define them apart from men.

The socialization in community plays a significant role in the formation of Muslim subjectivities (Vicini 2013: 396). This socialization also provides the affiliates with opportunities for networking. One of the most important rules in the community regarding the international students is that the students of the same nationality can not stay in the same housing. The sisters or close friends also are not allowed to reside in the same apartment. As I learned later, in the previous years the houses hosting the students of the same nationality were organized for a short time and were closed down. When I asked about the reasons behind such a rule and closure of these housings to one of my participants, she told me that she found it logical as there would not be adaptation or bonding (*kaynaşma*) to the rest of the community. Most of my participants claimed that they became acquainted with a lot of people in Turkey, most of whom were the participants of the movement, and developed networks across the globe. For instance, for Ceren, a graduate of the Turkish school, the community is a place where she acquired long-lasting friendships:

Ceren: We were always already studying and eating in one space. For example, we did not enter in mixed environments. Normally, in state schools in 10th or 11th grade they can enter alcohol environments. But we

did not and will not. We are alumnis now and next year it is the 5th year of our graduation and still any of our friends enter such environments. [...] All in all we were together 7/24. We made good friends there. It [Turkish school] provides you with the environment. Let's say we all graduated and we are all in some places. For instance I have some other friends in Turkey, in Russia, in our capital city in other different places but we all have something to do, we all have specific environment to go. I can say "this is my friend and she will never do certain things she will never do bad things". I don't know, some thoughts are fixed, they are stabile and will not change ever. This is good thing actually.<sup>69</sup>

She got excited while she was talking about her friends from the movement and told me that every summer is a time for the alumni reunion at the Turkish school. The teachers gather all the alumni and organize a *pilav* day or some other activities. Ceren claimed that the long distance is not an obstacle for organizing events and keeping in touch with all of her friends. The holidays, the travels and the activities are all organized together. As many of my participants narrated, during the holidays their friends from the movement hosted them in their own houses in different cities in Turkey or the *ablas* took them to the other cities for sightseeing and travelling.

### 3.3. Empowerment through the Socialization

The existing literature on women members of the movement traces the significance of their engagement with the movement and impact of Gülen's writings on their lives (Özdalga 2001, Pandya&Gallagher 2012, Rausch 2008, 2009, Stephenson 2006, Curtis 2005). These works on the women participants seek to explore the women's contribution to the movement and underscore their subjectivities by integrating their experiences. The perceptions of women in the movement regarding

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<sup>69</sup> Ceren: *Ya zaten hani sürekli bir alan içerisinde hem okuyoduk hem yiyoduk hem orda uyuyoduk. böyle hani karışık ortamlara girmedik mesela çok. normalde mesela devlet okulunda 10.sınıf veya 11.sınıf öğrencileri içki ortamına girebiliyorlar. ama bizde yoktu girmedik, girmeyiz de şimdi mezun olduk mezuniyetimizin seneye 5.senesi olacak ve hala da hiç bir arkadaş öyle bir ortama girmedik. [...]. sonuçta 7/24 onlarla beraberdik hep (gülüyor) yani çok iyi arkadaşlar kazandırıyor. yani şöyle hani belli bir ortam sağlıyor sana bütün hani diyelim ki hani hepimiz mezun olduk liseden hepimiz fakrlı yerlerdeyiz. mesela Türkiye'de bir kaç tane yine arkadaş var bilmem Rusya'da var başkentte var farklı yerlerde var ama hepsinin yapacağı iş, gideceği ortam belli. hani diyoruz ki direk diyebiliriz hani o benim arkadaşım liseden ve o bazı işleri yapmaz, kötü bişeyleri yapmaz. hani bilmiyorum hani sabitlendi diyelim bazı düşünceler oturdu değişmeyecek tarzında. güzel bişey aslında.*

gender hierarchies are also scrutinized in these studies. The common thread for the researchers who have looked at women in the movement is the stress on the personal development of the women affiliates that advance after their involvement in the movement. Most studies have shown that women's affiliation with the movement broadened educational and career opportunities for these women and improved their daily life conditions. For example, Özdalga's (2003) article analyzing the lives of three young women teachers in different schools of the movement in Turkey draws attention to the ways in which these women's engagement with *Hizmet* shaped their family life and career in a positive way.

Based on the ethnographic data collected from her research on women participants in the Gülen movement living in Houston, Texas Anna J. Stephenson (2006) stresses that these women "recognized, discussed, negotiated, and explored alternatives to some limiting status quo gender beliefs". Young women participants of the movement in Austin, Texas demonstrate transformations with regard to their identities as Muslims and Turks, according to Maria Curtis (2005). Similarly, Sophiya Pandya emphasizes how the immigration of women participants from Turkey to the US fostered by the movement has had a major impact on the lives of these women. The women members of the *Hizmet* community in the US comment on the importance of establishing a collective Turkish Muslim identity to allay hostile attitudes towards Muslims in the US and praise the movement for giving them the opportunity to participate in spreading the peace messages of Gülen and to contribute to interfaith dialogue. Additionally, these studies demonstrate how the movement's involvement generated these women's access to the public sphere and eagerness to make changes in the societies they live and work. This case study adds up to the existing literature on women participants of the movement. The hierarchical and homosocial dynamic of the relationships among women are not discussed sufficiently in this literature, nor are the family concepts that conceal these dynamics.

Differently from the women participants who left Turkey with the purpose of *hicret*, my participants were not aware of becoming a part of a global movement. However, there are shared notions in the accounts of the women leaving Turkey and my participants. Similar to the narratives of women migrating via movement's channels, some of my participants shared their stories of becoming more "independent" after their migration to Turkey. Gülnur and Selvi told me that they "felt like fish that was thrown from aquarium to the ocean" when they arrived in Turkey. Gülnur remembered her

school years and her father's control over her every movement and act. She underlined that every night she was saying to herself that her life could not be this way and she believed that everything would change one day. She associated coming to Turkey with becoming liberated:

Gülnur: Of course when I got accepted into university I was so happy, I had so many expectations from Turkey: My life will be different, everything will be different. And this happened. I have changed, I became completely different person, more self-confident. I discovered so many opportunities for myself. Before that to sit and to talk to a guy, no, it is impossible. But when I came here they call it self-confidence, this is self-confidence. You know before that what I was afraid of? I was afraid of going to any place and ask something, for example, to hospital or to any state institution. I do not know why but – may be because I spent most of my time at home, school home school home - I felt like everyone was looking at me and I will say something, etc. I was afraid of that. But here I felt comfortable, my family is very surprised.<sup>70</sup>

This change is also reflected in the stories of my other participants. Aylar mentioned that she was not afraid of making decisions about her life any more. According to Aylar, this happened because she travelled to Turkey and lived there without her parents. It is important to mention that the tutoring of *ablas* in the community is not limited to the religious sermons and controlling the rules. This teaching is very significant for the international students who for the first time arrive in Turkey. *Abbas* help these students from the very arrival. Most of my participants mentioned how they admired the selfless help of *ablas* in registration to university process, in orienting through the city, etc. Cemile told me she was very lucky to live with someone who attended the same university and was already experienced:

Cemile: Yes, I got used, it was not, I got used to university easily, and to the environment I already spent one day in the dorm and then directly came to the housing. Here they placed me with a Kyrgyz abla she was a year younger than me. Because she was Kyrgyz she told me everything do this

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<sup>70</sup> Gülnur: Tabii ki de üniversiteyi kazandığımda öyle mutluydum ki, Türkiye'den öyle beklentilerim var dı ki; benim hayatım bambaşka olacak her şey bambaşka olacak. Ve gerçekten de öyle de oldu. Ben değiştim, ben tamamen farklı oldum, çok daha özgüvenli oldum, kendime bir çok kapılar açtım. Önceden oturup bir erkekle konuşmak, hayır olamaz ama buraya geldim özgüven derler ya özgüven. Önceden mesela biliyomusun neden korkuyodum bir yere gidip bi şey sormaktan korkuyodum mesela hastaneye veya herhangi bir devlet dairesine. Bana nedense - zamanımın çoğunu evde geçirdiğim için ev okul ev okul bu baskıdan dolayı - herkes bana bakıyor, ben bişeyleri yanlış söylerim ve saire ve saire diye korkuyodum. Ama burda tamamen rahatladım, evdekiler de şaşıryolar.



do that; she was helpful in everything: you can get your ticket from there, etc. Because we went to the same university, well, it was very easy for me; it was easy to adapt. She was showing everything<sup>71</sup>.

The students of the same departments and of the same university are usually arranged in the same housing. There is a balance of senior and junior students within the housing as the elder and more experienced students are expected to help to the younger students to adapt to both community life and university life.

### **3.4. “Girls, girls, girls, everywhere girls”<sup>72</sup>: Homosociality and limited communication**

Upon their arrival to Turkey, the participants are directed either to the dormitories or to the student housings of the movement. Derya who studied in a state high school in Tadjikistan and got involved in the movement in Turkey during the first year of her studies described her first impressions of the dormitory as a space where there were “girls, girls, girls; girls everywhere”. During my fieldwork, I interviewed some of my research participants in the movement’s dormitories. In the course of one of my interviews, I heard an announcement that was warning the students about the presence of a male personnel at a certain floor: “To the attention of the students! There will be male personel working in the 4th floor. Please make the floor available/suitable!”<sup>73</sup>

That announcement once more reminded me about the strict gender segregation in the “private” domain of the community. Recalling her ethnographic experience, Berna Turam states that the arrangement of public and private space in the movement differs

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<sup>71</sup> Cemile: Aha alıştım yani şey değildi üniversiteye rahat alıştım ortama da zaten benim ilk geldiğimde yine evlere bir günlük yurda gittim sonra zaten direk evlere geldim. burdada şeydi okuyan bir kırgız ablayla koydular hani bir yaş büyüktü. o zaten kırgız olduğu için her şeyini bana anlatırdı şöyle yaparsın böyle yaparsın her konuda yardımcı olyuordu işte akbil şurdan çıkartılır şu şöyle herşeyi anlattığı için hem aynı üniversiteyi gittiğimiz geldiğimiz için hani şey oldu her konuda çok kolay oldu benim için de alışmam da çok kolay oldu. çünkü her şeyi gösteriyordu.

<sup>72</sup> Derya: Kız, kız, kız, her yer kız

<sup>73</sup> Yurtta kalan tüm öğrencilerimizin dikkatine! 4.katta erkek personel çalışma yapmaktadır. Katı müsait hale getirmeniz önemle rica olunur!

from other Islamic movements or organizations (2007: 119) as the *Hizmet* movement constructs its own “inside” and “outside”. She argues that gender segregation plays an important part of the socialization of the followers “inside” the movement: the women followers are socializing only with women and are not usually present in the non-private sphere of the movement (2007: 117). It is mostly the women from higher social and economic standings or women outside the movement who are more visible in the public sites of the movement rather than the active women followers (2007: 119-120).

Deniz Kandiyoti’s analysis of the gender segregated space in Muslim societies can be applied to the *Hizmet* student housing as well:

[Muslim women’s] segregated lives have been described either as instances of unrelieved oppression or as rich social lives in “parallel worlds,” with greater potential for psychological liberation than their Western sisters who have compromised themselves through prolonged social promiscuity with men. Their relationships to each other have also variously been described as typical instances of the divisive rivalry of the oppressed or, on the contrary, the sisterhood and solidarity of those with strong same-sex bonds. Apart from the fact that both visions tend to be relatively ethnocentric, they tell us very little about the underlying dynamics of women’s experiences. There is nothing in segregation per se that necessarily breeds rivalry or fosters solidarity. It will be suggested that it is the mode of control of female sexuality, which includes the practice of segregation, that has a direct bearing on how gender is internalized. (Kandiyoti 1987: 329)

I agree with Kandiyoti on the limitations of scrutinizing segregation as either “divisive rivalry” or “solidarity”. I suggest that segregation fosters the embodiment of gender and establishment of intense homosocial relationships. The term homosociality has mostly been utilized to describe the close bonds between men rather than women. Female homosociality is commonly reduced to female friendship, to feminist solidarity or to same-sex desire (Hammaren and Johansson 2014: 5). Hammaren and Johansson claim that homosocial relationships should be conceptualized according to national and socio-cultural contexts and within the “dominant sexual economy” (2014: 5). The homosocial relationships between women followers develop in the gender segregated environment of the *Hizmet* housing and crosses the boundaries of the student housing.

Fabio Vicini conceptualized the pedagogies of affection as “a specific modality through which exemplariness can activate its powerful effects and shape a specific kind of educated Muslim” (2013: 396). Drawing from the ethnographic data he collected in the male *Hizmet* housings in Istanbul, Vicini argues that apart from religious practices

the whole set of practices conducted collectively as leisure pastimes (football matches or playing video games in Internet cafes, etc.) ease the process of adaptation to the community's life and heighten the feelings of comradeship among the students (2013: 385). These relationships are built on major principles such as *saygı* (respect), *fedakarlık* (sacrifice, self-devotion) and *samimiyet* (intimacy) (Vicini 2013: 386-387). As Vicini argues, "the educational path was constructed on a delicate balance between distance and proximity that was continuously played out between the elder abiler and the younger talebeler" (2013: 386). This ambivalence of the relationship is also applicable to the relationship between the *abla* and the regular inhabitants of the dorms, which too is shaped with respect and intimacy. However, the relationships between these regular inhabitants themselves are more horizontally organized. Interestingly, the role of *abla* in the house is similar to the roles of mother in the "traditional" family; she is a guide of the house and controls the peace and discipline within the house. Interestingly, *ev annesi*<sup>74</sup> is (physically) absent in this framework and remains as a symbolic figure.

Although the students regularly attend activities organized by the *Cemaat*, the limited communication with their coursemates at their universities and non-attendance at the student events organized at the university indicate the extent to which the homosocial relationships established in the student housing shape the lives of the students.

Ceren: I am not in touch with the class very much. It may be because I am not used to it, well, I am from high school for girls and never entered mixed environment. But I am just talking to two girls in the class, I am not still talking to anyone; yet more I do not even know the names of all my male classmates. I am not interested at all, I did not talk to them ever. I never attended the events our girls in the class organized, I don't know why.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> *Ev annesi* (which literally means "mother of the house") is frequently a middle-aged married woman (either the follower or the sympathizer of the movement) who provides supply of provisions to the student housings or arranges *iftars* at Ramadan or dinners from time to time during the year. She is also engaged in the activities of the movement such as collecting donations or attending in weekly *sohbets* of the movement. *Ev annesi* does not reside with the students and does not have a lot of (social or emotional) attachment to the individual students.

<sup>75</sup> Ceren: sınıfla çok iletişim içinde değilim. muhtemelen alışık olmadığımındandır hani kız okulundan geldim ve karmaşık ortama girdim ya o yüzden ama sınıftan sadece 2 kızla konuşuyorum şuanda hala daha kimseyle konuşmuyorum ki sınıftaki bütün

Gaye: I did not ever have a boyfriend since my childhood, well, the social friend; thus, I did not find these things odd but of course there are people who regard these as strange because you are totally limited in having boyfriend.<sup>76</sup>

Gülnur: I mean when we arrive we were directly placed in *Hizmet*. Our first environment our first communication networks were Hizmet. Our thoughts were shaped by Hizmet, religion religion and so on. Our communication was limited. We just met those who were introduced to us. Usually, when you leave [the community], for example, when I started working, I did not meet people from *Hizmet*. I saw different Turks, the Turks with different ways of life.<sup>77</sup>

### 3.5. *Hizmet* (Housing) as Home

A common point in the narratives of my research participants is their quick adaptation to the *Hizmet* environment and a warm and welcoming reception by the followers of the movement in Turkey. When Gaye (Turkmenistan) arrived to Turkey for the first time to enter the exam, she was very much impressed by the hospitality and decent attitude of the followers of the Gülen community. The important thing to notice is that Gaye was already acquainted with the movement in Turkmenistan and was not a total stranger to the movement and the followers. She expresses her shock at the over-hospitality of the members of the community and relates it to “tolerance”:

Gaye: You see, people’s behaviour towards each other , especially if you are a foreigner a guest... after all in the place we stayed people gave their rooms even their bed to us... this left very strange nice feelings in us. whenI first arrived I did not see bad sides at all. Even if I saw I did not keep them in

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erkeklerin ismini bile bilmiyorum. *hiç ilgim yok, hiç konuştuğum olmadı. kızlar da sınıftaki kızlar da bazen etkinlik falan yaptıklarında da hiç katılmadım nedense.*

<sup>76</sup> Gaye: benim hep küçüklükten beri hiç erkek arkadaşım hani böyle sosyal arkadaşım olmadığı için hiç yadırgamadım bu şeyleri ama yadırgayanlar vardır yok değil çünkü gerçekten hani bir erkek taraftan sosyal arkadaşına kısıtlısın.

<sup>77</sup> Gülnur: Yani biz buraya geldiğimiz zaman biz direk hizmete yerleşiyoduk. *Bizim ortamımız bizim ilk iletişim ağlarımız hizmetti.* Yani bizim bütün düşüncelerimiz hizmetle şekilleniyodu, anlıyomusun, din din ve ona benzer şeyler. [...] yani *bizim iletişimimiz kısıtlıydı. Bize kimi gösterecek onu görüyoduk.* Ve doğal olarak sen oradan çıktığın zaman, mesela ben çalışmaya başladığım zaman ben hizmetten insanlarla karşılaşmıyodum. Ben bambaşka Türkleri gördüm, tamamen farklı hayat tarzı olan Türkleri.

mind, this means, I blocked them with the good things I saw. The surprising was the people's behaviour towards each other, well, being disciplined. The behaviour of men and women to each other. Very tolerant. This surprised me a lot.<sup>78</sup>

Yağmur: When I came to Turkey I found people very tolerant. In other words very hospitality, hospitable.<sup>79</sup>

Similarly, the graduates of Turkish high schools in their home countries highlighted the familiarity of the attitude, of the environment and of the people in the movement. Ceren, for instance, described her arrival in Turkey, even though it was her first time travel abroad, as an "ordinary process" ("normal bir süreçti") and emphasized that despite small problems she experienced she did not feel alienated from anything within the movement.

Another alumni, Cemile, also finds parallels between her lifestyle in the Turkish high school in Kyrgyzstan and in the *Hizmet* community in Turkey:

Cemile: Because from my very childhood I was already living away from my family I was not very much missing them or I was not having difficulties. We were coming in September and I went on winter holidays to my home country, after 3-4 month I went again and in summer holidays again. I am going there every summer holidays so it feels like I am in college just with one-two months difference, nothing more is different. Since I was staying away from my family from my childhood, since I was staying in a boarding school with the girls in this environment I know how to behave in what situation. Hence, I did not have much difficulty or did not feel estrangement or alienation and I did not have any disagreement with anyone. Elhamdulillah.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Gaye: İşte insanların davranışı, birbirine hele hele *yabancısın misafirsin...* ondan sonra işte *kaldığımız evde hani kalkıp ta kendi odalarını bize vermesi ordaki kalan kişilerin. yatağını dahi vermesi* böyle çok farklı, güzel duygular bırakmıştı (silence). ilk geldiğimde kötü tarafları hiç görmedim. Görmüşsem bile aklımda tutmadım, demek kapatmışımdır iyi gördüklerimle. Şaşırtan şeyler de insanların birbirine davranması, hani böyle disiplinli olmaları. Bayan ve erkeğin bir birine davranışı. Hani insanların bana böyle davranmasından etkilenmişim. *Çok hoş görülüler*. Bu beni çok şaşırttı.

<sup>79</sup> Yağmur: Türkiye'ye geldiğimde açıkçası ben insanları *çok hoş görüşlü gördüm*. Yani *hospitality misafirperver*.

<sup>80</sup> Cemile: hem zaten çok hani *küçüklüğümde beri ailemden uzakta kaldığım için hiç böyle hani çok özleyip de ağlayıp da şu bu sıkıntı çekmedim*. Çünkü zaten hani şeyde eylülde gelmiş oluyoruz kış tatiline de gidip geldim hani memlekete, sonra 3-4 ay gidip geldim sonra geri işte yaz tatilinde yine gittim. *her yaz tatilinde gidiyorum yani hani o yüzden normal kolejde okuyumuşum gibi sadece biraz bi iki ay farkı ile gidiyorum ki fark olmuyor*. (gülüyor) ben küçüklüğümde beri hep uzakta kaldığım için *kolejde de*

Along with the quick adaptation and integration into the movement, there also underlies the discourse of being adopted, accepted into and protected by the community. Karanfil, Cemile and Derya related their easy integration to the friendly attitude of the *ablas* in Turkey:

Karanfil: You see, when I came here in the first year there are the things here, there are *ablas* in Hizmet they took us, they took care of us. They welcomed us in their homes, so it was not difficult to adapt.<sup>81</sup>

Ceren: Yes, I got used, it was not, I got used to university easily, and to the environment I already spent one day in the dorm and then directly came to the housing. Here they placed me with a Kyrgyz *abla* she was a year younger than me. Because she was Kyrgyz she told me everything do this do that; she was helpful in everything: you can get your ticket from there, etc. Because we went to the same university, well, it was very easy for me; it was easy to adapt. She was showing everything<sup>82</sup>.

Derya: When I came I adapted very quickly and did not have any difficulties. I met very nice people. I did not have any adaptation issues, I adapted very quickly. We were always strolling around, the people were different. They were very helpful in everything. I liked everything. At those times it was more interesting, now I am used to it.<sup>83</sup>

Yağmur: These places seemed to me more hospitable. I do not know why, was it just to me or I found it like this. Well, those back [in my country] they are also, all in all, that is my country, right? Thus, I am supposed to get on well with them but when I came here or may be because I adapted very quickly, I did not have any difficulties, if you know what I mean? Nobody

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*yatılı kızlarla sürekli bu ortamda olduğum için hangi durumda nasıl davranmam gerektiğini bilirim. o yüzden mesela hiç öyle sıkıntı, yabancılık, anlaşmazlık çektiğim olmadı. Elhamdulillah.*

<sup>81</sup> Karanfil: Yani ben birinci sınıfa geldiğim zaman mesela hani haliyle şey vardır burda hani *ablalar vardır hizmette onlar aldılar bizi onlar sahip çıktılar* bu şeylere. *Bizi aldılar evlerine falan, hani ayak uydurmamız o kadar da zor olmadı.*

<sup>82</sup> Ceren: aha alıştım yani şey değildi üniversiteye rahat alıştım ortama da zaten benim ilk geldiğimde yine evlere bir günlük yurda gittim sonra zaten direk evlere geldim. burdada şeydi okuyan bir kırgız ablayla koydular hani bir yaş büyüktü. o zaten kırgız olduğu için her şeyini bana anlatırdı şöyle yaparsın böyle yaparsın her konuda yardımcı oluyordu işte akbil şurdan çıkartılır şu şöyle herşeyi anlattığı için hem aynı üniversiteyi gittiğimiz geldğimiz için hani şey oldu her konuda çok kolay oldu benim için de alışmam da çok kolay oldu.çünkü her şeyi gösteriyordu.

<sup>83</sup> Derya: Gelirken *iyi çabuk adapte oldum*, hiç bir sıkıntı çekmeden. *Güzel insanlarla tanıştım. Hiç öyle adaptasyon sorununun olmadığı, çabuk adapte oldum.* Geziyorduk hep, insanlar değişti. *Baya yardımcı da oluyorlardı her şeyde.* Her şey hoşuma gidiyordu benim. Hatta o zamanlar daha ilginç geliyordu şimdi artık alıştım.

found me odd or they did not say oh you are this, they accepted me among them very easily.<sup>84</sup>

Although the term my interviewees use is “adaptation,” it is also possible to associate it with “adoption.” Feelings of “adoption” (*sahip çıkma*) are related to the daily practices rather than religious teachings. Being taken care of in the housing as well as outside it strengthens this feeling. After stating that they accommodated to the movement without much difficulties, most of the students repeatedly underlined that they hardly felt homesick: “I do not remember myself sitting and crying about missing my mother or father. I was talking to them from time to time.”<sup>85</sup>

Throughout our conversation, Gülnur and Derya, who were students three or four years ago and who are working now, were continuously drawing back to their memories of being a student and of being affiliated with the movement. They both remembered about the excessive care and interest of the other followers and *ablas* in them:

Derya: They were very helpful, for instance when you do not understand something, I told you before, especially when it comes to history some girls from the upper classes were staying with us, they were telling write this or that, write Atatürk’s name a lot...And for the teacher of Turkish they said you should learn the first lines of national anthem very well, anyway he will not listen till the end. They were sharing such nice things. They were very helpful in every case. In the beginning they took us out a lot.

#### **These girls took a lot of care of you?**

Derya: They took care a lot. At those times we were very valuable<sup>86</sup>.

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<sup>84</sup> Yağmur: Bana daha çok ılımlı geldi buralar. Bilmiyorum ama bana mı karşı acaba yani yada ben mi öyle buldum bana öyle gedli açıkçası. He ordakilerde yani daha çok sonuçta orası benim vatanım değil mi? Daha iyi anlaşılmam lazım ama ya buraya geldiğimde ben yada hızlı adapte olabildiğim için mi bana öyle geldi hani ben bir zorluk çekmedim anlatabiliyormuyum? Kimse beni garipsemedi ayy sen böylesin demedi bana çok kolay aldılar içerisine anlatabiliyormuyum?

<sup>85</sup> Derya: Hiç oturup annemi özledim babamı özledim diye ağladığımı hiç hatırlamıyorum. konuşuyordum onlarla arasıra.

<sup>86</sup> Derya: *Çok yardımcı oluyordlardı*, işte mesela bişey anlamadığım zaman özellikle dedim ya sana tarih konusunda üst sınıftan bir kaç tane kızlar vardı biz kaldığımızda. Onlar bak şunu yap bunu yaz, bol bol atatürk diye yaz diye (gülüyor) türkçe hocasında da ne demişti işte istiklal marşının ilk satırlarını çok iyi ezberle diye, zaten sonuna kadar dinlenmez bi şekilde. öyle hoş şeyler anlatıyordu. *Baya yardımcı olmuşlardı her açıdan. Gezmeye götürürlerdi ilk dönemler.*

#### **Baya ilgileniyorlardı kızlar?**

Derya: *Çok ilgileniyorlardı.. yani çok kıymetliydik o zamanlar.* (gülüyor)

Gülnur: I guess there were a small number of foreign students at those times and in other words everyone was surprised, everyone was interested in you “oh, you are a foreigner”, and so on...<sup>87</sup>

Gülnur (Turkmenistan), who criticizes the movement for being “ill-intentioned” and who demonstrates her awareness about the movement’s expectations from her (to return back to home country, to work for *Hizmet* and to marry someone from *Hizmet*), does not hesitate to express her gratitude for their “first aid” help. Gülnur does not believe in the philanthropical deeds of the followers; she relates these to the religious fanaticism and denounces the pressure in the movement. However, she too reflects very positively on the environment of the student housing and accentuates on the “carefree”, troubleless life in the movement’s housings and dormitories. She described movement as a warm and safe place where the followers are taken care of:

Gülnur: Of course I am wholeheartedly grateful to them for offering the first help even if they have their own interests. But they never taught us anything bad, it was just a little bit of fanaticism. Yes, they offered the first help. Maybe we are here now thanks to them and helped others thanks to them. Because you have home here, you have a place a home to go. Because you have a food to eat even if you donot have a penny in your pocket. Do you get it? It is always warm in your flat and you do not have to think about the bills and about who will pay them, etc. Yes, I am very grateful to them. One can not say anything else, of course there were a little pressure<sup>88</sup>.

As suggested in these narratives and especially in Gülnur’s descriptions and reflections of the movement’s student housing, the students very quickly feel at home in the community. As they illustrate, the organization of the duties and responsibilities within the house makes them feel comfortable and safe. Gaye lived in a housing without an *abla* for a semester and was very unsatisfied and denounced the movement for creating such a “disorder.” She remembers that year as the worst year she experienced during her affiliation in the movement. In Gaye’s story, the order is associated with the

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<sup>87</sup> Gülnur: O zamanlar galiba az yabancı geliyordu öğrenci yani ve herkes şaşırıyordu herkes sana ilgi gösteriyodu aaa yabancı aaa şöyle böyle...

<sup>88</sup> Gülnur: Tabii ki de onlara yürekten kocaman bir teşekkür *ilk yardım elini uzatıyorlardı* çünkü, kötü niyetle yapsalar da bunu. Ama bize hiç bir zaman kötü bişey öğretmediler sadece azıcık fanatizmdi. Evet, ilk yardım elini uzatıyorlardı. Belki şuan biz onların sayesinde geldik ve başkalarına yardım ettik. *Çünkü senin bir evin vardı, çünkü gideceğin bir evin vardı. Çünkü yiyebileceğin yemeğin vardı cebinde bir kuruş olmasa bile . Anlıyomusun? Evinde her zaman sıcaktı ve sen hiç bir zaman faturayı kim ödeyecek falan filan diye düşünmüyodun. Evet onlara gönülden teşekkür ediyorum. Başka hiç bişey diyemezsin, tabii azıcık baskı vardı ama.* (my italics)



presence of *ev ablası* and she does not only have moral/religious obligations towards the people living in the flat but also responsibility to create an “order and balance.”

On the other side, the “unconditional” economic support provided to the students make them feel both at home and at the same time alert and uncomfortable. Due to her bad economic condition, Aylar received financial support from the movement. The meetings where *ev ablası* gathered the rest of the young women and asked them to pay the rent, Aylar felt uneasy:

Aylar: When they give stipend, the abla of housing talks, she gathers all and talks about the expenses. [She includes you] as if you also give the money. After that she is saying “please, dear friends, make both ends meet this month”. There are also those who did not give money for several months among Turks, she gathers them to collect the money. There is just one thing, you can not talk because you do [give] nothing, someone else is giving instead of you. Everyone speaks out their opinion but you just sit there.<sup>89</sup>

After making an accent on the economic support that movement provides for the students Gülnur further in our conversation emphasized that she still advises the other students (her relatives or the acquaintances) to stay in the movement regardless of her critical stance. Gülen in his writings and sermons underlines the importance of worldly ascetism. The ideal man (*insanı kamil*) should be a person with no attachment to comfort and luxury.

### 3.6. Learning through *Hizmet*

Gülen (in Can 1997:75-78) explains that the new generations began to reconcile the fragmented, and even polarised, institutions in Turkish society: *modern science of the public schools (mekteps, colleges), religious knowledge of the madrasa (medrese), spiritual life and feeling of the tekkes and zaviyes (sufi lodges) and the discipline of the barracks (kışla)*. (my italics Çelik, 43)

All these fragments could be found in the student housings and dormitories as well. The main accent though is made on the collective learning within the student

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<sup>89</sup> Aylar: Burs falan verirlerken evin ablası konuşuyor ya şimdi, evindeki maddiyatı konuşuyor, hekresi topluyor. Sanki sende içinde veriyosun gibi ya. Ondan sonra o konuşuyor işte “ayın sonun kadar arkadaşlar ne olur denkleştiririm”. Bir kaç ay vermeyen de var zaten Türklerin içinde de, öyle denkleştirmek amacıyla herkesi topluyo. *Bi tek şu var konuşamıyosun, çünkü sen bişey yapmıyosun ya, senin yerine başka birisi ödüyor. Herkes kendi tepkisini söylüyor sen sadece orda susuyorsun.*

housings. One of the women followers in Raush's article underlines the importance of tutoring each other in the Gülen community:

Being involved in these activities with people who share the same values has changed my life for better because it makes me *feel like part of something big and important* instead of feeling alone and isolated. It is part of human nature at times to feel alone and isolated and as if nobody knows what one is going through, whereas *by being actively involved with a community I have realized that we have so much in common with others* and that *others can benefit from my experiences and how I overcame or dealt with certain issues just as much as I can benefit from theirs.* (Rausch 2012: 141)

My participants narrated their experience of learning while describing their adaptation to the movement's environment in Turkey. In their stories the student housing is imagined and constructed not only as home but also a place where students tutor each other. Surprisingly, Arzu who identified herself as an atheist and criticized the movement for the disciplinary regulations, stated that during her stay in the housings her Turkish improved and that she learned a lot about religion in the tea hours (*çay saati*). Although at the beginning she was feeling uncomfortable at *sohbets*, she was motivated by her flatmates to learn religion. In their accounts, other students also stressed that they "learned a lot of good things" in the movement or that the followers "did not teach anything bad". Teaching and learning plays a significant role in the movement. Learning certain rules or learning the essentials of the movement can be a measurement of one's commitment to the movement or can provide a follower/ a member a certain status in the movement. All of the newcomers pass through certain learning process within the movement.

The learning process of the students does not only consist of learning religion but also the everyday practices. Cemile, who spent her five years in the dormitory while she was a student at Turkish high school, told me that she could not even prepare a meal or wash her laundry before she arrived in Turkey. She emphasized that she learned a lot from her flatmates – the followers - and now knows how to cook Turkish cuisine better than Kyrgyz meals:

Cemile: I remember, when I first arrived here my teacher came to visit me. I never do any housework at my home because I am the youngest one and I have my mother and my brother's wife. I did not know how to cook or to do any other stuff and also I stayed in college [boarding school] you just eat and go. I was used to go home as a guest, everyone calls me when a table is set up, I eat and go to my room. When I came here they taught me how to

cook, for example I do not know how to cook Kyrgyz meals but I am know how to cook Turkish food.<sup>90</sup>

The followers also help each other with their courses at university. Derya told me the other followers gave her some tips on the courses she was not familiar with:

Derya: They were very helpful, for instance when you do not understand something, I told you before, especially when it comes to history some girls from the upper classes were staying with us, they were telling write this or that, write Ataturk's name a lot...And for the teacher of Turkish they said you should learn the first lines of national anthem very well, anyway he will not listen till the end. They were sharing such nice things. They were very helpful in every case.<sup>91</sup>

As it is suggested in the narratives of my interviewees, the relationships between the followers are based on the mutual learning and teaching as well.

### 3.7. Performing *Hizmet*

As Butler emphasizes, the notion of performativity must be seen as the repetitive and citational practice rather than singular or deliberate acts (Butler, 1993; 1999). Butler conceptualized this notion to explicate gender reproduced in time and space via repetitive bodily acts. I argue that this notion can also be applied to the followers of the movement as serving the movement is a kind of performativity. The followers internalize the rules and regulations of the movement and reproduce their service through collective and individual bodily acts. The daily practices of *namaz* (prayers),

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<sup>90</sup> Cemile: Ben ilk geldiğimde hatırlıyorum hocam gelmişti ziyarete hani bakmaya ben bizim evde hem annem hem yengem olduğu için bir de en küçüğü olduğum için hiç hiç iş yapmam yapmamıştım ne yemek yapmayı biliyorum ne başka bişey hiç bişey yani birde kolejde kaldım yani geliyosun yiyosun kalkıyosun gidiyosun. çok alıştığım için evde misafir gittiğim için her zaman böyle sofrta hazırlarken çağırıyorlar yiyorum gidiyorum odama. Öyle şeydi hani geldim böyle yemekleri falan öğretiyorlardı mesela ben Kırgız yemeklerin yapmasını bilmiyorum ama Türk yemeklerini yapmasını biliyorum.

<sup>91</sup> Derya: *Çok yardımcı oluyorlardı*, işte mesela bişey anlamadığım zaman özellikle dedim ya sana tarih konusunda üst sınıftan bir kaç tane kızlar vardı biz kaldığımızda. Onlar bak şunu yap bunu yaz, bol bol atatürk diye yaz diye (gülüyor) türkçe hocasında da ne demişti işte istiklal marşının ilk satırlarını çok iyi ezberle diye, zaten sonuna kadar dinlenmez bi şekilde. öyle hoş şeyler anlatıyordu. *Baya yardımcı olmuşlardı her açıdan.*

*tesbihat* (collective practice of rosary) and *sohbet* (in the movement's context "a religious speech delivered by the senior member") can be pronounced as examples of such practices. Muhammed Ahmed in his thesis explores the role of *sohbet* practice in forming particular selves. He argues that the followers aim to build "an Islamic habitus" following Gülen's ideas (2013: 4).

Apart from these collective practices, there are also rules that have to be fulfilled by every member. For example, there is a set time for the entrance of the housing (by the evening prayers) and a certain dress code is dictated within the walls of the housing that complies with *edep/adap*<sup>92</sup>. Moreover, there are strong rules against romantic affairs. Thus, the movement maintains spatio-temporal, bodily control of its followers. All of these rules are articulated by *abla* at the very beginning of the year and sometimes reminded throughout the tea hours.

Becoming a role model for the other followers constitutes a significant part of relationships in the movement. The movement tries to assign a duty to almost everyone in the community and try to involve everyone into the activities of the movement. The newcomers and those who are not very much aware of the system are at first paid more attention and assigned to someone who is more experienced and more knowledgeable about the movement. Most of the first year students stay in the housings or dormitories without having any duty. The movement is based on the rhetorics of role-modeling and tutoring of the "lost one". As I already mentioned in the Chapter I, the term *rayet* reveals the movement's intention to name and identify each and every member of the movement as a representative of the community and a role model for the society. The discourses of *temsil*<sup>93</sup> and *tebliğ*<sup>94</sup> are extensively used in *sohbets* and the written literature of the movement. They are central and interrelated to the community's

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<sup>92</sup> *Adab* means good manners. In the context of the movement *adab* means conform to the ethical and moral values inspired by Gülen's discourse on formation of Muslim youth.

<sup>93</sup> *Temsil* means representation.

<sup>94</sup> *Tebliğ* means explicating religious messages to people. For more on *temsil* and *tebliğ* discourse of the movement see: Toguslu, E. (2007). Gülen's theory of *adab* and ethical values of Gülen movement. *Muslim World in Transition: Contributions of the Gülen Movement*, 445-458.

conduct of educating through being example. Role modeling is not assigned only to those who are active in the *Hizmet* movement but to everyone involved in the community. Ceren underscores that not the words but the acts of the teachers in her school influenced her:

Ceren: Our teachers did not tell us specifically what is wrong and what is right. To drink is wrong to smoke is wrong, etc they did not tell us these things but they did not do these themselves. I assume because of this; the life style of the people we take as an example is obvious. Because they do not do what they tell not to do they give us advices and prompt us to think about some things.<sup>95</sup>

Ceren's narrative reflects how the messages delivered by the movement's leader have found their way to individuals in the movement. Gülen continuously motivates his disciples to be a good example for their students:

Role model teachers—as intermediaries, teachers... provide the link between life and the self... [they] find a way to the heart of the pupil and leave indelible imprints upon his or her mind. Teachers... will be able to provide good examples for their pupils and teach them the aims of sciences... through the refinement of their own minds... They should know their students well and address their intellects and their hearts, spirits and feelings... [and] show special concern for every individual, not forgetting that each individual is a different “world”. (Gülen 2006)<sup>96</sup>

However, returning to Butler's theorization of performativity, it should also be remembered that the possibility of agency is located within the structures of power and that the repetitive acts do not only solidify certain regimes of power but also destabilize them (Butler 1993:15). Thus, conceptualizing the above-stated acts solely as consolidating the structures of power will be limiting. On the other side, drawing from my observations on the field and the narratives of my participants, I would argue that there are also alternative ways of performing *Hizmet*. I do not argue that these ways are destabilizing in the sense Butler conceptualizes it, but rather a different modality of agency (Mahmood 2005) that I will elaborate in the next chapter when discussing gender perceptions of my participants. In the meantime, Aylar's example of taking

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<sup>95</sup> Ceren: Yani böyle neyin doğru neyin yanlış olduğunu hani hocalar bize özellikle söylemedi. işte içmek yanlıştır sigara içmek yanlıştır falan filan diye onlar bize hiç şey söylemediler ama kendileri de hiç yapmadı öyle şey. sanırım o yüzden hani sürekli örnek aldığımız insanların hayat tavrı belli.ve bir de onlar yapmayın dediği şeyleri kendisi de kesinlikle yapmayan insanlar olduğu için çok hani tavsiye vermekte veya bizi bazı şeyleri düşünmemizi sağlamakta çok yardımcı oluyorlardı.

<sup>96</sup> “Our education system” retrieved from: <http://fethullahgulen.org>

responsibility and becoming *abla* in the movement will provide a sense of the different modality I am referring to. She was assigned to a duty of *belletmen* (*abla* in dormitories) for a year in one of the high school dormitories. For her taking responsibility was not only tutoring and spreading the word of the community. She was against being a role model to someone and was explaining being *abla* as “having fun with girls” :

Aylar: How to say it, it is two years since I left. I reacted from the very beginning. They tried to accustom you to wear a skirt or not to veil but to wear a proper dressing; it would be better if you veil at home. But I was acting according my wills, if I wish it I would do it , if not then I would not. You can not make someone do something. For example, we were going to camps and I was the centre of attention, I love having fun and entertain people. But some say “you are and adult you should pay attention to what you say everyone should take you as an example”. No one should take me as an example, I am still a child inside I still have wishes to fulfill. I can not sacrifice myself so that they took me as an example. I was a tutor in the 3rd year; they should not take me as an example. I told it to my students as well “I am a tutor but do not consider me as an adult, I want they same entertainment as you. I was having fun, we were having jokes and talking about nonsense at tea hours...”<sup>97</sup>

She told me that her students were trusting her so much that they could tell her even about their romantic affairs easily. Selvi mentioned a similar situation in her story. She was against the community’s rules and was very hostile to the high school students<sup>98</sup> coming to their apartment to study with the *ablas*. However, later, as she narrates, she started talking to them and felt attachment. She wanted to be their *abla* and tutor them. According to Selvi, there was a mutual understanding between her and the

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<sup>97</sup> Aylar: Nasıl diyim hatırlamıyorum ki 2 sne oldu çıktım cıkalı ama su vardı ben ilk bastan tepkimi koymuştum ben. hani ne bilim bir etek giydirmeye alıştırırlardı kapatmak değil de evin içinde yine de adaba basın ortulu olsa daha iyi olurdu tarzı ile bakarlardı. ben daha çok isteğe bakarım yani benim canım istiyorsa yaparım istemiyorsa yapamam kusura bakmayın zorla da guzellik olmaz. örneğin *kamplara falan gidiliyo ya eğlence merkezi bendim*, çok da severim eğlenmeyi insanları eglendirmeyide eğlenmeyi de çok severim. ondan sonra he bzaları diyo sen buyuksun sen konusmalarına dikkat et senden herkes örnek alsın. *benden kimse örnek almasın*, ben halazaten cocugum içimde hala yapmak istediklerim var şimdi kalkmış o benden örnek alıyor diye kendimi onun için feda edemem ki. bi de şöyle bişey var senden örnek alıyolar, *ben 3.sınıfta belletmendim benden örnek almasınlar. ben ogrncilerime de söylemiştim ben belletmenim ama beni büyük biri olarak zannetmeyin ben deszin gibi aynı eğlenceyi istiyrum aynı o şeyi yaşamak isityorum. eğlenirdim de kızlarımla çay saatlerinde komik komik şeylerd e konuşurduk yada saçma sapan şeyleri de...*

<sup>98</sup> High school students are invited by the ablas and abis to study at the student housing and in a meantime learn about the university. Sometimes they stayed overnight.

students. When the students asked the senior members to appoint Selvi as their *abla*, they were rejected. Selvi claims that this happened because she is Christian. I suggest that there is one more point that is missing. Usually, as Vicini points in his article the relationship between *abi* and *talebe* (younger students) are neither too formal nor too intimate: “While on the one hand they have to keep the proper distance (*mesafe*) from the talebeler, on the other, the age closeness created a certain ambiguity in the relationship and allowed the young students to relate more easily to the educators, including joking”. (2013: 386) In this sense, Selvi’s “too much” closeness to the students might have caused a threat to the relationships’ ambiguities of moving between two poles of friendship and authority.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I attempted to scrutinize the gendered relationship between women affiliates, as well as between men and women. Drawing my arguments from the participant observation and my personal experience I argued that the movement depicts itself as a big global family. This chapter focused on how the Central Asian female students integrate into the fictive family of the *Hizmet* community and how they themselves define and experience the relationships in this community. Throughout their accounts, the young women I interviewed described their relationships with *ablas* and other people in the movement through kinship terms, as well as friendship/comradery. Moreover, this analysis demonstrates that *Hizmet* housing is one of the central sites where fictive kin relations are established and consolidated. Exploring the gender segregated, homosocial characteristic of this site of communal living and interaction, I underline the significance of gender in the analysis of the *Hizmet* movement and community. I suggest that the *Hizmet* housing has different meanings for my participants. It is both a site of networking, socializing and learning and also a space for performing *Hizmet*. However, one of the most significant features of the *Hizmet* housing is that it is imagined as home, while the movement itself is imagined as a family.

## CHAPTER 4: GENDER AND THE *HIZMET* MOVEMENT

Scholars who have been questioning the social mobilisation of women affiliates in the movement from a feminist perspective have criticized the male-oriented and male-dominated structure of the movement (Turam 2007; Özdalga 2003; Rausch 2012; Stephenson 2006). This scholarship suggests that the mobilization of women in the movement have been used by the Gülen movement as a tool to preserve its image of a liberal movement. In line with this thought there is also a belief that the movement improves the position of women in order to demonstrate its difference from other Islamic movements (Turam 2007). In other words, inclusion of women in the movement was projected by the male actors of the movement. Women's presence in the movement contributed to its recognition both in Turkey and internationally. Along with this perspective some of the scholars also argued that women's participation in the movement challenged the existing gendered discourse and norms of the movement. (Turam 2007, Karatop 2011)

Being active in the movement for several years and leaving it afterwards provided me with insights on the experience of gender inequalities along the axis of submission and agency/resistance. Agency and resistance have been widely debated in post-colonial theory and Subaltern studies. Recently, this debate has been revitalized in the works of scholars exploring Islam and women. The key anthropological studies in this scholarship such as Saba Mahmood's *Politics of Piety* (2005) and Lila Abu-Lughod's *Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power through Bedouin Women* (1990) have addressed the main dilemma in the discussions of agency and resistance: the support and participation of women in the socioreligious movements (particularly Islamist movements) that sustain norms of female subordination. In the course of my



fieldwork, I was preoccupied with similar contradictory questions: How do women affiliates (of *Hizmet* community) sustain reproduction of the binary gender system and their own inferior position in this binary? And how do they resist or subvert it? Deriving from Mahmood's conceptualization of agency "not simply as a synonym for resistance to relations of domination but as a capacity for action that specific relations of *subordination* create and enable" (author's emphasis, 2005: 18), in this chapter I will explore "different modalities of agency" (Mahmood 2005) involved in everyday practices of the women affiliates of the *Hizmet* community.

As I already stated in the previous chapters, I attempted to read the narratives of my participants attributing to them "forms of consciousness or politics that are not part of their experience – something like a feminist consciousness or politics" (Abu-Lughod 1990: 47). I approached my interviewees with the questions of how their experiences differ generally from men and specifically from the male students in the movement and expected criticism of the gendered structures not only within the movement but also outside of it. While my participants were willingly replying to the inquiries about the women's positioning in the "outside" world, I needed to ask specific questions to reveal their senses and experiences of gender in the movement. In this chapter, analyzing the accounts of my research participants through a critical gender lens, first, I will look at the scholarly literature that studies women participants of the movement and try to identify the focus and gaps of this literature. The positioning of women and men in Gülen's works are important as the followers are inspired by his views and beliefs expressed in his writings and talks. Thus, I will also analyze his books and sermons through a gender lens. Furthermore, in this part, I will integrate my ethnographic experience and data collected from the interviews and participant observation to explore the senses and experiences of gender by female students from Central Asia in the movement in Turkey. In this chapter, I trace the following questions: What are the perceptions of my participants regarding gender, women and leadership within the Gülen movement? How do these perceptions overlap with Gülen's beliefs and ideas? How do/are their gender perceptions affect(ed) by the movement's discourse?

#### **4.1. Women, Gender and the Gülen movement**

#### 4.1.1. “Where are all the women in the movement?”<sup>99</sup>

There is a growing scholarly literature on the gendered aspects of the Gülen movement, there are still , where the focus is mainly on women’s invisibility in the movement’s managerial positions and gender-segregation. Though highly valuable, this literature has several gaps. Most importantly, the current ethnographic works commonly integrate the experiences of the affiliates who have certain positions in the movement, rather than the ordinary *rayet*. Moreover, women students are studied even less in this literature.

It is important to pinpoint that almost all of the ethnographic case studies on women in the movement were conducted outside Turkey and mostly in institutions of the *Hizmet* movement in the US or Europe (Stephenson 2006; Hallzon 2008; Pandya&Gallagher 2012; Rausch 2012; Curtis 2005; Andrea 2007). One of the main limitations of these works conducted by researchers who do not speak Turkish is that there is a lack of (sociohistorical) conceptualization and contextualization. It is also important to mention that some of these works were presented at the conferences organized by the movement or published at the web sites of the movement like [fgulen.com](http://fgulen.com), [rumiforum.org](http://rumiforum.org), and [fethullahgulenconference.org](http://fethullahgulenconference.org). This does not necessarily mean that these works lack critical perspective or take a pro-Gülen stance. Rather, I would argue that the movement presents its “openness” to criticism by “allowing” some of researchers to enter their domain and by setting a platform for discussion of number of issues that relate to the movement. In the following paragraphs I will scrutinize specifically the literature on gender and women affiliates of the community.

Grounding her arguments on the ethnographic data she collected for her thesis, Anne J. Stephenson (2006) researched the life stories of women participants in Houston, Texas and how their life experiences affected the gender norms of the movement. She argues that her research participants demonstrated the recognition of restrictions emanated from gender norms within the movement but, at the same time, had

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<sup>99</sup>This is a question asked by a female American scholar at the conference named *Muslim World in Transition: Contributions of the Gülen Movement* organized in 2007 in London (Hallzon 2008:290)

conflicting thoughts about whether and how to resist these limits. Sophia Pandya (2012) interviewed eighteen women members of the Gülen movement's Pacifica Institute in California who shared their experiences of migration (*hicret*) and engagement with the movement on their lives. Pandya (2012) underscores these women's dedication and aspirations to spread the Gülen's messages, to avert the negative stereotypes of Muslims and to publicize an image of "successful, dignified and charitable" followers of the movements (112). The interaction of the movement with diverse communities in US does not only lessen the gender segregation of the community but also prompts the change in gender roles in both public and private sphere (Pandya 2012: 110-112). Similarly, Maria F. Curtis (2005) accents on the enormous contribution and activism of women participants of the movement in Texas. In both of her articles about the movement Margaret Rausch (2008, 2012) conducted research on the women affiliates' residing in the US, especially in Kansas, and highlighted their endeavours to follow the vision and interpretation of Gülen regarding *hizmet* and leadership in her study. She scrutinized the impact of the spiritual gatherings *sohbet* and teachings of Gülen on the lives of women members in US. Her findings based on ethnographic work reveal how the personal development of women, their advancement in career and their daily lives strongly connected to devotion to their faith (632). The movement developed its networks through building associations promoting interfaith dialogue in Europe as well. In his article *The Gülen Movement: Gender and Practice* Patrick Hallzon focused on gender experiences of women in *Dialogslussen* – one of the organizations inspired by the visions and ideas of Fethullah Gülen in Sweden. Similar to the previous works, Hallzon emphasizes the empowerment of women affiliates through education and interaction with people of different nationalities and with different beliefs. His works converge with other ethnographic works on the idea of changing gender roles within the movement outside Turkey.

On the other side, the existing scholarly literature falls short regarding women participants in the movement in Turkey. Elizabeth Özdalga's article "Following in the Footsteps of Fethullah Gülen: Three Women Teachers Tell Their Stories" where she suggests that despite "the strongly conservative" ideology and gender hierarchy in the movement, there is also a space for self-realisation and "individual initiative and autonomy" for women members (2000: 114) is one of very few works scrutinizing the experiences of women participants in Turkey. Berna Turam also conducted an

ethnographic research in Turkey, Kazakhstan and the US where she states the similarities between Fethullah Gülen's and Atatürk's vision on women. Based on interviews with men and women participants in these three destinations, Turam claims that the integration of women into the movement was not because they approved of women's liberation but because they wanted to dispel the negative image of Islam as a source of women's subordination and oppression (114-116). In lieu with Turam's claim, I will elaborate this notion by analysing my participants' narrative further. The women participants outside Turkey seem to be more willing to share their stories with the scholars studying the movement. I suggest that the reasons for these might be, first of all, the community's attempts to be more visible in public and second, to eliminate the stereotype of "oppressed Muslim women". Also, it is important to note that the movement received less criticism in Europe and the US than in Turkey or other countries. For instance, Pandya's interviewees narrated about the social and political oppression in Turkey regarding veiled women and how they escaped this oppression by migrating to the US.

As Rausch points out, another prevalent suggestion in the current scholarship regarding gender issues in the movement is the denunciation of "Western" stereotypes of Muslim women (2012: 134). April L. Najjaj blames "Western" scholarship for victimizing Muslim women and adopts a more universalistic and essentialist approach to women's issues: "there are more similarities than differences in the lives of women, whether in the Islamic or Western world" (2013:163). Moreover, she agrees with Yavuz that the Gülen movement provides a "third way", "a middle ground between traditional Islam and the modern world that can provide all Muslim women (not just Turkish ones) the opportunities of work and education without an overthrow of Islamic values" (Yavuz 2008:853 cited in Najjaj 2012:167). Berna Turam's (2007) and Najjaj's (2012: 165) works converge on one point: the movement's public events (*iftars* and celebrations) that try to bring people from different backgrounds with different religious beliefs contributes to the dialogue, interaction and change of perceptions about Islam and women in the movement on the personal level.

One should also note that the existing scholarly literature overlooks the construction of masculinities within the movement. The only extensive study that I could reach regarding the male subjects' gender experiences is Ibrahim Tevfik Karatop's thesis research on construction of masculinities in the Gülen movement.

Karatop argues that masculinity codes within the movement have undergone transformations along with the changes in the macro-political arena. He conceptualizes the 28th February process<sup>100</sup> as a breaking point and argues that after 1997, the movement constructed “new forms of masculinity codes which can be considered as more tolerant to the relationship between men and women followers” (2011: 81). Though briefly, Sophiya Pandya also argues that “Gülen men demonstrate alternative masculinities” (2012: 110). She states that whenever her interviewees spoke of Gülen-inspired masculinities, they narrated the positive affect of it on their lives.

## **4.2. Gender: Crossing the Boundaries**

### **4.2.1. Agency or Resistance?**

The reflections of my participants regarding the gender system are conflicting and ambivalent. I must admit that I was initially preoccupied by a search for the instances of resistance and opposition to the gendered organization of the Gülen Movement among my interviewees. Searching for “subversive resistance” and not coming across such acts of resistance, at first I overlooked the subjectivity of my participants. I could not move beyond the dichotomy of resistance/submission and tried to read all of the acts of my participants in the theoretical framework of “dominance.” Lila Abu-Lughod would criticize this approach as “romanticization of resistance”, as tendency “to read all forms of resistance as signs of ineffectiveness of systems of power and of the resilience and creativity of the human spirit in its refusal to be dominated” (Abu-Lughod 1990: 42). She adds that such analysis “collapse[s] distinctions between forms of resistance and foreclose[s] certain questions about the workings of power” (Abu-Lughod 1990: 42). Although Saba Mahmood finds Abu-Lughod’s conceptualization of resistance as a

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<sup>100</sup> 28th February process is also known as a 1997 military memorandum or post-modern coup d’etat. The process was initiated by the meeting of National Security Council to end the coalition government and to induce the resignation of Necmettin Erbakan, the prime minister. Karatop argues that 28th February process had brought not only changes in political climate but significantly affected the lives of Islamic communities in Turkey. He states that the Hizmet movement also had undergo some changes like gaining upper mobility in class terms as well as generating “new eclectic codes of masculinity by mobilizing discursive openness of cemaat.”(2011: 68-76)

“diagnostic of power” (Abu-Lughod 1990: 42) valuable, she adds that Abu-Lughod “does not challenge the use of the term ‘resistance’ to describe the whole range of human actions” (Mahmood 2005:9). In her discussion of “different modalities of agency” Mahmood moves beyond theorization of agency as synonymous with resistance (2005: 17-18). Thus, she suggests

[N]ot to propose a theory of agency but to analyze agency in terms of different modalities it takes and the grammar of concepts in which this particular affect, meaning and form resides. Insomuch as this kind of analysis suggests that different modalities of agency require different kind of bodily capacities, it forces us to ask whether acts of resistance (to systems of gender hierarchy) also delve upon the ability to behave in particular ways (2005: 188).

Responding to a more general question about whether their gender played a role in their migration, education in Turkey and affiliation with the movement, my participants displayed recognition of gender discrimination in most spheres of their lives. Their decisions on education and choices of their life style have been influenced by their gender. Most of my participants endorse that migration to Turkey both provides them with the opportunities for self-empowerment and also raises their awareness about gender discrimination. Aylar puts her feelings of “emancipation” in the following words:

Aylar: For example, in the past I never said “this is my freedom, this is my freedom, do not limit my freedom” but I say it now. To anyone. For instance “where are you going?” “to this place”, “where are you going at the moment?” I will reply “to this place” but I will never take permission from my mother or from anyone else. He [boyfriend] says “look, it is better for you not to return back late” or “ Why am I informed now?” I reply “I remembered to tell you now. This is my life.”

**Would it be the same if you studied in Turkmenistan not in Turkey?**

Aylar: No, it would not. My freedom would be limited. Because I would be shouting “this is my freedom” alone. But when I came here I went to any place I wanted and did not ask anyone. Should I ask my mother for permission? In the past I always asked my mother when I was going shopping “Mom, should I buy this or not?” but now I am not. If I go somewhere or buy something I always asked. I came here I never asked I never felt the necessity.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Aylar: Ben eskiden “bu benim özgürlüğüm, benim özgürlüğümü kısıtlamayın” demezdim örneğin ama artık bunu diyorum. Herkese karşı. Örneğin, “nereye gideceksin?” “şuraya” “nereye gidiyosun şuan?” söylerim “şuraya” diye ama hiç izin

I would not interpret these as a resistance to the gender system or as a reflection of feminist consciousness but rather as a process of gaining relative autonomy from the family. As it was discussed in the first chapter, some of the young women from Central Asia whom I interviewed enunciate how they become more conscious about the world around them after their arrival to Turkey. While some of my participants indicate gender discrimination in the education and state institutions more explicitly, just few acknowledged the gender bias of their family and the movement. In this chapter I will focus on these two channels as they intersect in various contexts. The dynamics of gender discrimination varies in every student's narrative and lie at the intersection of time and space. There is no single stable and homogeneous representation of woman in the narratives of my participants.

#### **4.3. Commitment to Traditional roles: “Mothering” the movement**

“Now I look and say “Is there any family more beautiful than this one?” Look at the beauty of living together despite different languages and colors. Who is destined to have such a family? I thank God thousands of times, may God bless these children.”<sup>102</sup>

These words were pronounced by Sevgi Karyağdı who received Fidelity Award<sup>103</sup> at the World Mother's Day Program organized on the 11th May 2014 by the Baran

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almam ne annemden ne başkasından. “Ya bak geç gelmesen daha iyi olur senin için” falan filan diyo. “Benim diyo niye şimdi haberim oluyor?” “ee benim de şimdi aklıma geldi söylemek”. Benim hayatım bu.

#### **Türkiye’de değil Türkmenistan’da okusaydın böyle bişey olabilir miydi sence?**

Aylar: Olamazdı. O özgürlüğüm kısıtlanırdı. Çünkü tek başıma ben özgürlük diye bağıyorum, benim özgürlüğüm diye bağıyorum. Ama artık buraya gelip gittim ya istediğim her yere gittim. Kimseden sormadım, sormuyodum arayıp annenden mi izin alcan? Kimseden sormuyodum bişey alırken alış veriş yaparken “anne, şunu alayım mı?” derdim eskiden ama artık demiyorum. Bi yere gideceksek alış veriş yapacaksak pazara gideceksek 70 kere sorardım annemden. Buraya geldim hiç sormadım ihtiyac duymadım.

<sup>102</sup> “Şimdi bakıyorum da bundan güzel aile var mı? Baksanıza farklı dilden, farklı renkten bir arada yaşamının güzelliğine. Böyle bir aile kime nasip olmuş? Rabb’ime binlerce şükür olsun, bu evlatlar için bin evlat feda olsun” Retrieved from *Zaman*, a newspaper of the movement: [http://www.zaman.com.tr/aile-saglik\\_dunya-anneleri-istanbulda\\_2216520.html](http://www.zaman.com.tr/aile-saglik_dunya-anneleri-istanbulda_2216520.html) on 11th May 2014.

<sup>103</sup> 2014 Dünya Anneler Günü Vefa Ödülü

International Students and Culture Federation<sup>104</sup>. The program organized by the Federation aimed to bring the mothers of the international students in the *Hizmet* Movement in Turkey and mothers of the teachers in the Turkish schools abroad together. In the program, the Hizmet movement was represented as a big global family which is boundless and inclusive. Reproducing the principles of heteronormative family, the movement also attempts to substitute for a family by cooperating with mothers. I do not argue that this alternative totally deviates from the family framework but it rather tries to replace the control of the actual family with its own. Yeşim Arat in her study on the women participants of the Refah party argued that the women were developing familial relationships and social networking through interpersonal emotional linkages (1999: 40-44). The friendships of these women were launched in the contexts of tea talks and social gatherings rather than in the political domain (ibid.). I observed similar relationships in the *Hizmet* movement as well. While in case of Refah party women religion has played a significant role in the mobilization of women, in case of the *Hizmet* movement, imagined historical familial ties add up to religion as backbone of mobilization. It is not a surprise that women are attached the roles of mothers in this context. The growing accent on the mothers and motherhood in the discourse of the movement reveals the movement's gendered attitude and nationalist tendencies going hand in hand. The public representation of women participants as mothers or self-sacrificing teachers constantly reproduces these heteronormative roles in the context of *sıla* and *gurbet*<sup>105</sup>.

Gülen's ideas and teachings take significant place in the follower's lives; thus, when analysing gender issues in the movement it is very important to explore how women and men are represented and positioned in Gülen's writings and sermons. The foundational values and principles of orthodox Islam have been promoted in Gülen's writings with regard to the daily life practices and principles. Gender segregation is one of the principles that Gülen encourages his followers to practice. He follows the idea

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<sup>104</sup> The Baran International Students and Culture Federation is an umbrella association that unites 13 organizations supporting and conducting activities with the international students in the Hizmet Movement. It was built in January 2013. More on Baran International Students and Culture Federation see: <http://www.baranfed.org/>

<sup>106</sup> *Sıla* means homesickness and *gurbet* means being away from home. These two words are very frequently used for the teachers who have left their home country for *hicret* and for Fethullah Gülen himself, as he has been in self-imposed exile since 1999.



that men and women are complimentary in nature. Grounding his arguments on the interpretations of Quran and Hadith, Gülen argues that women and men are created as “two bodies and one soul” (2008: 2). He places woman and man at binary poles and states that this order and balance of the world was created in the time of Adam and Eve:

In one sense we don't separate men and women. In one sense there are physical and psychological differences. In my opinion, women and men should be the two sides of truth, like the two faces of a coin. Man without woman, or woman without man, cannot be; they were created together. Adam suffered in Heaven because he had no mate, and then Heaven became a real Heaven when he found his mate. Man and woman complement each other. (Gülen 2003<sup>106</sup>)

God has created women and men in relation to each other as He created the electron in relation to the proton, the negative pole in relation to the positive one, the female seed in relation to the male one. As He composed a whole from these pairs, He willed woman and man to make couples. Yes, as the positive is joined to the negative, the electron is joined to the proton, night is joined to day, summer is joined to winter, and the earth depends on the sky, to the same extent woman and man are created dependent on one another. God's Messenger expressed this truth as follows: "Surely, women are the other half of men." (Gülen 2008)<sup>107</sup>

However, this essentialist dichotomy is not specific to the movement. Nilüfer Göle analyzes the Islamic discourse that was “shaped during the late 1970s by Islamist thinkers all over the Muslim World (such as Abu-l Maudoodi in India, Sayyid Qutb in Egypt, Ali Shariati in Iran and Ali Bulaç in Turkey) and by the Iranian Revolution” (Göle 1996: 141)<sup>108</sup> as being based on an attempt to search for an “authentic” Islamic self by distinguishing itself from the “West” and emphasizing its “authenticity”. Defining the essential foundational roots of the “Islamic” identity has been one form of resistance to the “Western” way of life (18-20). The difference among sexes and among

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<sup>106</sup> Gülen, F. (2003) Women and Women's Rights. Retrieved from: [http://www.fethullahgulenchair.com/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=139:women-and-womens-rights&catid=41:guelen-thoughts&Itemid=186](http://www.fethullahgulenchair.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=139:women-and-womens-rights&catid=41:guelen-thoughts&Itemid=186)

<sup>107</sup> Gülen, F. (2008) Women Confined and Mistreated. Retrieved from: <http://en.fgulen.com/recent-articles/2897-women-confined-and-mistreated>

<sup>108</sup> Göle uses terms like Islamic movements and radical Islamism interchangeably in her book. She identifies Islamism as “project of transforming society through political and social empowerment” (1996:141).

generations are reproduced in this Islamic discourse which does not accept any deviance from or blurring between the feminine and masculine roles (Göle 1996: 19). I suggest that even though Gülen does not totally reject the “Western” life-style he adopts identical conduct with regard to the “authentic” Islamic self. He emphasizes the inherited messages of equality, balance and harmony in Islam based on the division of roles and difference between women and men. Gülen does not only reinforce “the motto ‘Islam Is Beautiful’ that gained credence among Muslims” (Göle 1996: 17), but also adds that “Islam is sufficient and liberating” in and of itself:

Islam does not need any ideology or doctrines like propaganda imported from outside. Its reference is itself and the representation of the follower’s behaviour. It always prefers to be on the side of justice, to glorify justice and to consider the respect to the justice as a worshiping.. Islam considers equality as respect to person and the will of God and counts neglecting of equality as a big crime against humanity (Gülen 2000)<sup>109</sup>.

Feminism is one of the “western” ideologies that is suggested in the quote above. Gülen denounces feminism for distracting “balance” and “order” in the universe. Feminism, according to Gülen, puts pressure on women to reject their nature and willing to bear a child and become mothers. He conceives it as a foreign ideology that propagates for chaos instead of equality and liberation for women and forces women to undertake the jobs that are not suitable to their “physiology and psychology”:

On the other hand, while correcting these mistakes, approaching the issue from a feminist standpoint will upset the balance again and an opposite extremism will replace the former. For instance, just as it is very ugly to see women as merely child-bearing objects and is insolence towards them, it is equally unbecoming and unnatural to build a society where women are unable to bear and bring up the children they wish for, or for a woman to feel a need to rebel against marrying and to avoid bearing children in order to show that she is not a machine. As a woman is not a dirty dish, her place at home is not confined to the kitchen with the dirty dishes. However, a woman who claims to have no household responsibilities and thereby turns her home to a quarters for eating and sleeping is far from being a good

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<sup>109</sup> *İslâm'ın, dıştan ithal edilen herhangi bir ideoloji ve doktrin gibi propagandaya ihtiyacı yoktur. O'nun referansı kendisi ve vefalı temsilcilerinin tavırlarıdır. O, her zaman hakkın yanında olmayı, hakkı tutup kaldırmayı yeğler ve hakka saygıyı en büyük ibadet sayar... İslâm, eşitliği, Hakk'ın isteği ve insana saygının gereği olarak görür.. ve onun sarsılmasını ya da tamamen ortadan kaldırılmasını insanlığa karşı işlenmiş büyük bir cinayet sayar. Gülen, F. (2000) İslam Ruhu. Kendi Dünyamıza Doğru. Yeni Ümit, April-June, 6/48. Retrieved from: <http://tr.fgulen.com/content/view/664/3/>*

mother, a good teacher, and a good spiritual guide to her children. (Gülen 2008<sup>110</sup>)

When one of my participants described feminism as a movement against men it enlivened my memories about the year I was a senior student and took Women Studies class in the university. From that days I remember my uneasiness at the idea of becoming a feminist because at the beginning I associated feminism with the hatred of men and being rebellious. I do not argue here that it was just because the movement constructed a negative image of feminism but I am trying to reflect on how I could not overcome the feeling of estrangement and could not imagine myself as both feminist and Muslim at the same time. These two identifications seemed to be conflicting and opposing each other. After talking to my participants I realized that the reason for my confusion might be this conduct of feminism as harmful and extremist. The complicated relationship between religion and feminism has always been questioned in the literature on women and Islam. This has been a dilemma for me as well. Moving beyond the conflictuality of whether religion, in particular Islamic religion, liberates women or not, I tried to understand the meaning of feminism for my participants. The distanced attitude towards feminist ideology and the legitimization of certain forms of oppression of women revealed the similarities between Gülen's opinion on feminism and my participants' stance. During my fieldwork, I talked to one of the male followers and asked about his opinion on feminism. He replied very shortly: "Why do we need feminism? We have Islam! We can find any solution in Islam." It echoed Gülen's belief about the sufficiency of Islam in all the emerging problems.

Gülen affirms that women are granted a very specific position in Islam: they are nurturers, educators and keepers of a hearth in their essence. Though he emphasizes that Islam does not restrict women's roles to domestic work and raising children, on the other hand, he constantly reminds women about their "sacred" duties. Berna Turam conducted research on the interaction and cooperation between Islam and the secular state in Turkey argues that the movement's attitude towards women resembles the nationalist projects of enlightenment. Women are imagined as nurturers and educators of the nation in both discourses. Turam argues that the public visibility of women members of the movement is not something that have been achieved but rather

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<sup>110</sup> Gülen, F. (2008) Women Confined and Mistreated. Retrieved from: <http://en.fgulen.com/recent-articles/2897-women-confined-and-mistreated>

“granted” by male members who engineered the social projects. She questioned the invisibility of women in the administrative positions of the movement and have rightly criticized these binary oppositions as they clearly create gender hierarchies and legitimize women’s subordination.

Additionally, even though the Hizmet movement seems to provide women an opportunity for advancing their careers, it does not ease their traditional duties of mother and wife. Gülen himself underscores that the most significant role of a woman is being a mother and a keeper of a hearth:

Women train and educate children, and establish order, peace, and harmony in the home. They are the first teachers in the school of humanity. At a time when some are in search of a new place for them in society, we would like to remind them once again of the unique position God bestowed upon them. A house that contains an honorable, well-mannered woman loyal to her home is a corner from Heaven.

Most of my participants’ responses illustrate that they honour Gülen’s thoughts on women and gender in general. I suggest that the movement does not allow women to compete with male leaders and prevents them in advancing to higher positions by laying other burdens on their shoulders. However, deriving from Mahmood’s argument that “to analyze people’s actions in terms of realized or frustrated attempts at social transformation is necessarily to reduce the heterogeneity of life to the rather flat narrative of succumbing to or resisting relations of domination” (Mahmood 2005: 174), it is important to point out that following Gülen’s thoughts (in regard to women in Islam and in the movement as well) is a way of cultivating correct Muslim self for these women. This mode of agency is different from Butler’s concept of agency as a political praxis that aims to destabilize dominant discourses of gender and sexuality (Mahmood 2005: 21) and Abu-Lughod’s understanding of resistance within the fields of power (ibid. 8-10).

#### **4.4. Universalizing Women’s Oppression/Gender Bias: “Everywhere Men are Freer Than Women”**

Though being aware of gender differentiation, my participants did not express a lot of interest in it. I do not imply that these young women ignored or avoided talking about the gendered experiences or that they found the gender bias acceptable. They

simply seemed to naturalize the subordination of women. Throughout my fieldwork, I encountered a lack of interest by my participants with regard to women's position in the movement. However, it is possible to argue that they tried to justify their apathy to this subject by universalizing women's issues. As my participants put it, women are second class citizens everywhere, even in the democratic countries like the US. Yağmur believes that the women's subordination is not specific either to Turkey or to Turkmenistan; it is universal and a long-dated issue:

Yağmur: I always say I wish I was a man... because I don't know... there is a social pressure. You say a girl, they say "oh my! Why should a girl study?" But thanks God, I never heard such a thing from my father. When I went back home last year my father said "Look, dear, we sent you all abroad, please do not make us feel ashamed. This is the only thing we want from you. Be happy, but do not make us ashamed, do not make our efforts go to waste"... Sometimes I think I wish I was a boy but it is totally because of society not because of my parents; I say fortunately I am a girl.

#### **Why then do you say you wish to be a boy?**

Yağmur: Because this is the truth: Men are allowed to do more things than we are.

#### **For instance?**

Yağmur: Everything, anything. If a man comes home at 1 or 2 am in the morning nobody asks what were you doing, but if it is a girl there will be gossips, etc. like "it is morally improper, look at that girl". Even in the state, there are very few women, very few women who could reach the high position in the state. Tansu çiller fiftieth or fifty fifth state; Angela Merkel in Germany, and may be Hillary Clinton; that is all I know. Can you imagine even in the most democratic in the most developed countries women were granted rights to vote in 1920 and rights to be elected in 1960, it is fifty years ago. Our world exists for million years but even in the most developed country the right to elect was given in 1920 and to be elected as a president or a minister in 1960 in America.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Yağmur: *hep derim bunu keşke erkek olsaydım derim... çünkü bilmiyorum ...gerçekten toplumsal bi etki var ya baskı var yani. Bir kız dersin, amaan kız okur mu derler derler ama çok şükür babamdan bu tarz şey hiç duymamışım. Benim babam hatta geçen sene yazın eve gittiğimde dedi ki kızım bak hepiniz dışarıya gönderdik ne olur yüzümüzü kızartmayın tek istediğimiz bu dedi mutlu olun dedi ama yüzümüzü kızartmayın benim bu kadar size verdiğim şey boşa gitmesin ... arasıra keşke erkek olsaydım diyorum ya tamamen toplumsal yönden düşünüyorum ama anne babamdan dolayı değil iyi ki de kızım diyorum.*

#### **Neden peki erkek olsaydım diyorsun?**

Yağmur: Çünkü bu bir gerçek *erkeklere daha çok şeye izin veriliyo.*

#### **Ne mesela?**

As it is suggested in Yağmur's narrative, state and society are male-dominated. However, like most of my participants, she does not recognize family as patriarchally structured. Family is almost always left out of the patriarchal order in the narratives of my interviewees. Strikingly, the movement and the family accompany each other in the narratives of my participants regarding gender differentiation. Similarly, Gaye refers to the universality of the "problem". She underscores that she does not find the limitations regarding women originating in the *Hizmet* movement and that her family tries to "protect" her not to "restrict" her. Family and the Gülen community are interchangeable in most of the narratives especially when these women are talking about the rules and order in the movement. Most of my participants identify the mechanisms of control as protection from the outside hazards:

Gaye: Men are more free than ladies everywhere. It is not just in Hizmet. They are everywhere, women are restricted everywhere comparing to men. For example, normally when I think of my family, I am forbidden to go out at night. Well, not forbidden but my parents do not advise me. "do not go out, do not do this, do not go here, do not go there". But there is nothing like this for my brother because he is a man. Hence, there is freedom, of course...<sup>112</sup>

#### 4.5. "They can not hold them tightly; they have lots of places to go if they leave"<sup>113</sup>

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Yağmur: *Herşey, her konuda yani erkek gece gider eve 1-2 de gelir kimse ne yaptın demez ama kıza bu ahlak gereği güzel olmamış, ya bu kıza bak ya, dedikodular bilmem neler hep.* Ee hükümette de bir yere gelmek çok az sayıda gördük bir kadının hükümette olması çok az. Tansu Çiller miydi 50.55. hükümet. Angela Merkel almanyada belki Hillary Clinton e yani ben fazla görmedim mesela. Ee bu *en gelişmiş en demokratik toplumlarda da kadınlara 1920 de mi seçim hakkı vermişler seçilme hakkı da 1960 da gelmiş yanii bir elli yıl önce düşünsene* ama dünya ne zamandır ayakta milyonlar oldu ama en gelişmiş toplum bile seçme hakkı 1920 da vermiş seçilme hakkı bi cumhurbaşkanı olmak, başkan olmak 1960 da gelmiş Amerika'da.

<sup>112</sup> Gaye: *Erkekler her yerde bayanlardan daha rahat.* sadece yani hizmette demiyorum. her yerde onlar, *bayanlar her yerde kısıtlı biraz erkeklere göre.* mesela normal ben ailemi düşünsem bana gece çıkmak yasak. yasak demeyim de pek önermiyo annem babam. Çıkma, öyle yapma, böyle yapma, oraya gitme, buraya gitme. ama abimde öyle bişey yok çünkü o erkek. erkek olduğu için. o yüzden bi rahatlık illa vardır...

<sup>113</sup> Onları sıkı tutamazlar ki zaten, onlar çıkarlarsa bir sürü gidecekleri yer var

When analyzing my field notes, I realized that almost all of my participants demonstrated awareness about the gender differentiation in the practices of the movement as well. It is important to note that they acknowledged the supremacy of men in the movement. However, most of them do not fault the movement or do not see the movement as a contributor to the reproduction of gender norms. Indifference of these young women students from Central Asia to the discriminating gender order of the movement should not be analyzed as submission to the principles of subordination of women. In the scholarly literature on women affiliates in the Gülen movement, I came across similar accounts of other women in the movement (Stephenson 2006, Turam 2007, Rausch 2012). Gaye puts her lack of interest in men's experiences in the movement clearly in the following words: "burdaki erkeklerin ne yaptığını, nasıl yaşadığını hiç bişey bilmiyorum". What surprised me more than disinterest to gender bias was that my participants tried to justify this attitude. Almost all of my participants agreed that different rules and attitudes are required to "keep male students within the movement". According to my participants men should be kept "loose" so that they would not leave the movement. They justified the priorities and privileges given to male followers in the movement in the following words:

Ceren: I they should be free in regard with rules. All in all, they are men. They can not hold them tightly, if they leave they can find many places to stay. Well, I do not know, for instance, if a lady leaves the housing, it is not clear where she would go which environment she would enter. I guess because of that they try to apply the rules regularly. But men wherever they go to they do not have anything to lose and maybe because they can leave whenever they want the rules are more flexible for them.<sup>114</sup>

Nergiz: You do not behave the same towards girls and men; there are ways you treat men ad the ways you treat girls. Girls should be protectec all the time. There is such a thing: if men leaves nothing happens. I do not know but you do not treat them the same you do not place them equally. If men were not more free, if there were no such conditions, I think it should be like

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<sup>114</sup> Ceren: Ya kurallar konusunda bence serbest olabilirler. erkekler sonuçta. *onları çok sıkı tutamazlar ki zaten ve onlar çıkarlarsa gidecekleri bir sürü yer var. yani bilmiyorum mesela bayanlarda mesela evlerden çıktı diyelim nereye gideceği belli olmaz hangi ortama gideceği belli olmaz.* o yüzden mesela kuralları düzenli oturtmaya çalışıyorlar sanırım. ama *erkekler nereye giderlerse gitsin onların kaybedeceği bişey yok ki sonuçta (gülüyor) ve onlar istediği zaman çıkabilecekleri için belki de kurallar biraz daha gevşek.*

this. But you can hold girls anyway, if you impose a ban they do not oppose it.<sup>115</sup>

Besides the essentialist characteristics attributed to women and men, the outside world is imagined as a male's world in the accounts above. Moreover, contrary to male followers, my participants asserted that they were not allowed to enter the housing whenever they wanted:

Gaye: Men are more free than ladies everywhere. It is not just in Hizmet. They are everywhere, women are restricted everywhere comparing to men. For example, normally when I think of my family, I am forbidden to go out at night. Well, not forbidden but my parents do not advise me. “do not go out, do not do this, do not go here, do not go there”. But there is nothing like this for my brother because he is a man. Hence, there is freedom, of course... for instance, they have television. Why? They watch football. We could watch series... They go out at 11 or 12 oclock at night to play football. They go out and they come back.<sup>116</sup>

Karanfil: I guess ladies have more things restrictions more discipline. More precisely, they try to protect ladies. After the evening prayer call. But for men it is different they can walk around until 12 at night.<sup>117</sup>

One of the first questions that is asked when you are registering for *Hizmet* dormitory or housing is whether you have a boyfriend: “gittiği gibi onlar bana: “sigara içmiyosun? Alkol kullanmıyosun? Ve erkek arkadaşın olmamalı” dediler” (Arzu).

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<sup>115</sup> Nergiz: Erkeklerle aynı davranamazsın erkeğin de davranma yönü var kızın da davranış yönü var. *kız hani her zaman korunması gereken birşey. şöyle bir durum var erkeklerin yani, erkekler çıksa da birşey olmayacak. yani ne bilim ikisine de aynı davranamazsın yani aynı şeyde koyamazsın. erkek biraz daha serbest olmazsa yani o şartlar olmazsa yani hani biraz da öyle gerekiyodur yani. ama kızları her türlü tutabilirsin yasak koydun mu çiğneyemez.*

<sup>116</sup> Gaye: *Erkekler her yerde bayanlardan daha rahat. sadece yani hizmette demiyorum. her yerde onlar, bayanlar her yerde kısıtlı biraz erkeklere göre. mesela normal ben ailemi düşünsem bana gece çıkmak yasak. yasak demeyim de pek önermiyo annem babam. Çıkma, öyle yapma, böyle yapma, oraya gitme, buraya gitme. ama abimde öyle birşey yok çünkü o erkek. erkek olduğu için. o yüzden bi rahatlık illa vardır... mesela bir televizyonun olması neymiş futbol izliyolar. biz de dizi izleyebilirdik... gece oluyor saat 11de 12de o da sadece futbol oynamak için çıkarlarmış. çıkıyolar ondan sonra geri dönüyolar öyle yani.*

<sup>117</sup> Karanfil: bayanların daha sıkı böyle şeyi var galiba sıkı biraz disiplinli diyelim daha doğrusu *bayanları muhafaza etmeye korumaya çalışıyorlar* akşam ezanından sonra falan ama erkeklerde böyle değil 12ye kadar da dolaşabiliyorsun dışarlarda falan.



However, this restriction does not work equally for men and women students in the movement:

Karanfil: As far as I know they can have girlfriends but it is impossible for ladies. Of course there are who [date] talks on internet on facebook, those who are always in touch but for men they can [date] in an open way. Because men are disobedient I do not think they will follow the rules that should be. Maybe they [the elder members of the community] are trying to keep up with them<sup>118</sup>.

Gölnür left the movement because she had a romantic relationship. At the moment when Gölnür started to meet her current husband, she was living in *Hizmet* housing. She states that she was lucky because she had a good, close relationship with *abla*. When everyone started to notice her relationship, she was already engaged with her husband. Once Gölnür's roommate and close friend, Rana, informed her that *ablas* were always asking her about Gölnür and that she does not want to lie anymore. Upon this event, Gölnür went to the *abla* and told her about her relationship. The first question of *abla* was whether her boyfriend was from *Hizmet*. Upon the negative answer, the *abla* told Gölnür that she had to inform the ones who are in higher ranks. Because of their close relationship, she made the necessary arrangements for Gölnür to stay there for several more months and told *ablas* at the higher posts that Gölnür will marry her fiancé in the summer. "The things might be different if he were from *Hizmet*", claims Gölnür. Even though she was very upset with this situation, she denounced some followers in the movement and did not fault the movement's mechanism of control:

Gaye: My father and mother know. After my parents know I do not have to account to anyone, do you understand? That is all. My parents know, they engaged me, that is simple like this. End of story. Then she told me that she would talk with the senior ones and tell them that I am getting married in summer. She helped me in this time very much, she told me to finish this term and leave the subject till then. If you really get married... she talked to the senior ones. When it was summer, they started to ask too many questions and I came to myself and left the community. Although they

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<sup>118</sup> Kananfil: Sonra onlarda mesela hani kız arkadaşları olabiliyor bildiğim kadarıyla ama mesela bayanlarda bu hani olamaz. Tabii ki var da hani şey yapanlar facebook üzerinden internet üzerinden [...] konuşanlar sürekli irtibatla olanlar var da ama erkeklerde tabii açık bir şekilde olabilir [...] hani erkekler zaten biraz dik kafalı olduğu için kurallar konsa bile hani uygulanacağını sanmıyorum belki ona göre ayak uydurmaya çalışıyorlardır diye düşünüyorum.

themselves hang around to the left to the right... I assume if he [her boyfriend] was from Hizmet , everything would be different.<sup>119</sup>

Gaye who had a boyfriend, also an affiliate of the movement, kept her relationship secret as well. When I asked whether anyone in the movement knew about her relationship, she replied that just very few close friends were informed and that she does not have an intention to talk about it to the *ablas* because her parents already approved of it. To my very surprise, she wholeheartedly supported the restriction on romantic relationships. She told me the story of a couple who “were caught” in the student housing. She clearly stated that she did not approve of “such kind of relationships”:

Gaye: The parents trust their children to this organization [*Hizmet*] because they think they would keep their children away from these stuff. But she stayed in the housing and did all kinds of stuff with her boyfriend in the holiday when nobody was there. Well, I approve of the restrictions in this sense.<sup>120</sup>

On the contrary, when I inquired about her boyfriend’s attitude towards this secrecy and whether he told his *abis* about their relationship, she replied that it was not the same:

Gaye: I think men are more free, I should not say it is ban, but I guess there is such a ban that is valid in the both sides. But men, I assume, talk in a more proper way, may be or because they are chatterboxes, we say to everyone that we have a relationship. But they do all the things in a right way. For example, he [her boyfriend] knows and he tells to the person he trusts that he has a fiancée. There is no reaction there. First of all, they [the senior *abis* who are informed about a relationship] ask whether the

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<sup>119</sup> Gaye: Benim annem babam biliyolar, benim annem babam bildikten sonra ben kimseye hesap vermek zorunda değilim ki anlıyomusun? Bitti. Benim annem babam biliyo, bağladılar beni bu kadar basit yani olay bitmiştir. O da diyo ki o zaman şöyle anlaşalım ben yukardakilerle konuşacam ve senin yazın evleneceğini söyleyicem. Bu konuda o bana baya yardım etti, bu dönemi bi bitir gerisini sonra konuşuruz dedi. Eğer gerçekten de evleneceksen... işte yukardakilerle konuştu. Yaz geldiği anda bana bin bir türlü soru sormaya başladılar ben ayıldım ve ordan çıktım. Kendileri sağa sola gitmelerine rağmen... . hizmetten olsaydı herşey farklı olurdu diye düşünüyorum.

<sup>120</sup> Gaye: Anne baba bu kuruma güveniyor çocuğunu çünkü bu işlerden uzak tutarlar diye ama hani kimse yokken tatildeyken evine gitmeyip erkek arkadaşlarıyla her türlü bişeyler yapıp serbest olmaları. hani bu açısından yasaklanmasını ben de onaylıyorum.

fiancee's parents know and when you say "they do", they[abis] approach it normally.<sup>121</sup>

As suggested in the narratives above, women students legitimize the gendered attitude of the movement by rearticulating the discourse of the movement and teachings of Gülen regarding women. Gülen in his writings and sermons ascribes women "feminine" characteristics and approaches their position in society from an essentialist perspective: women and men are "two faces of the coin"; they are different but "equal". Based on my interviews, it can be stated that the words of my participants resonate Gülen's statements. These young women do not oppose the dichotomous representation of a woman and a man. Grounding his arguments on the common Islamic understanding, Gülen argues that women should not undertake "heavy tasks" because it is against their nature and essence – she is "like a flower worn on the breast". He claims to acquire the Islamic ideal of equality and balance that defines women and men as a complimentary but different halves:

women and men are equal halves in terms of their humanity, but neither of them is ever the same as the other. They hold certain differences in their primordial nature, physical potentials, spiritual worlds, and psychological structures; but men are not a biologically mature form of women, nor are women a less or more developed form of man. Both are individual human creatures and they are in essential need of one another. ... Besides all this, it is another form of oppression to make women work under difficult conditions, such as mining and road-building. It contradicts human nature to push women into heavy tasks like agricultural manual labor, or military field operations, and other harsh pursuits, just for the sake of proving their equality with men; it is nothing but cruel torture (Gülen 2008<sup>122</sup>).

Cemile's image of a woman matches with the one described in Gülen's teachings. As most of the participants underline, woman is in need of protection and should be taken care of:

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<sup>121</sup> Gaye: erkeklerde bence rahat, öyle bi yasak demiyim de yasak vardır iki taraflı da geçerli. ama hani *erkekler bence daha düzgün mü konuştuğu için yoksa hani onlar geveze olmadığı için mi mesela biz herkese söyleyebiliyoruz böyle böyle ilişkimiz falan var diye. onlar böyle toplu düzgün yapıyor bütün işleri.* mesela sadece o biliyo, mesela güvendiği kişiye de söylüyo böyle böyle işte konuştuğum hatta nişanlım da diyebiliyo. pek tepki yok yani. *anne babası biliyo mu diye ilk önce soruyolarmış tabii.* biliyo diyince normal karşılanıyor diyo.

<sup>122</sup> Gülen, F. (2008) Women Confined and Mistreated. Retrieved from: <http://en.fgulen.com/recent-articles/2897-women-confined-and-mistreated>

Cemile: Also, in our religion women, well woman means “to hide”; it comes from the word *katın*. In the same sense, why men accompany [women]? To protect. In the same way, a man can get bad name but at least he protects his wife; he does not put forward his wife for her doings. Also, I think there is one good thing in *Hizmet*, for example, lady means, of course, if she wishes she can become famous, but for her protection... lady is already a fragile, light and fragile being, I think if men take over it is right thing.<sup>123</sup>

The apathy in regard to established gender norms was legitimized through an essentialist approach and naturalization of gender differences.

#### **4.6. Veiling as a performance and gendered practice: “You have to unveil here. Do it keeping this in mind”**

Another contradictory dispute that has been central to the major debates on women and Islam is veiling. The movement claims to be open-minded and liberal regarding veiling. Gülen’s statements about veiling have raised a lot of debates<sup>124</sup>. Based on my personal experience and research, I argue that the movement puts its aims ahead of veiling and personal choices of women to veil in the movement. My intention here is not to discuss the politicization of veiling but rather to explore how my participants experience it. In her prominent work *Politics of Piety*, Mahmood explores the formation of (modest) pious self in case of women participants of mosque movement and draws attention to veiling as performative act in this formation:

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<sup>123</sup> Cemile: Birde mesela dinimizde kadının şöyle ya *kadın demek zaten saklanmak demek katın kelimesinden geliyor*. aynı şekilde *mesela erkekler niye eşlik ediyorlar çünkü korumak için*. aynı şekilde erkeğin adı çıkabilir ama sonuçta eşini korumuş oluyor herkese eşini bu yaptı diye öne çıkarmamış oluyor. bir de mesela hizmette de bunun güzel bir yön olduğunu düşünüyorum çünkü bayan demek hani tabii ki meşhur olabilir isterse kendi adına da .. ama onun da korunması için *bayan zaten narin hafif zayıf kırılacak bir varlık olduğu için her zaman mesela erkeğin üstlenip bunu şey yapması doğru olduğunu düşünüyorum*. hani üstlenmesi.

<sup>124</sup> Ertuğrul Özkök’s interview with Gülen that was published in *Hürriyet* in 27 January 1995 opened a lot of discussions on the movement’s approach to veiling. Gülen was blamed for claiming the veil as a detail not an essential obligation of Islam. For more information on women and veiling in the movement see: Yavuz, M. S. (2008, November). Women in Islam: Muslim Perspectives and Fethullah Gülen. In *Conference proceedings, Islam in the Age of Global Challenges: Alternative Perspectives of the Gülen Movement*, Georgetown University.

[W]hat is also significant in this program of self-cultivation is that bodily acts – like wearing the veil or conducting oneself modestly in interactions with people (especially men) – do not serve as manipulable masks in a game of public presentation, detachable from an essential interiorized self. Rather they are the critical markers of piety as well as the ineluctable means by which one trains oneself to be pious. While wearing the veil serves at first as a means to tutor oneself in the attribute of shyness: one cannot simply discard the veil once a modest deportment has been acquired, because the veil itself is a part of what defines that deportment. (Mahmood 2005: 158)

Göle makes a similar argument putting forward that “veiling, which represents submission to God, in fact reinforces the alteration of the consciousness”, and is “a basis for identity transformation at the level of the individual consciousness” (1996: 130). These two arguments are also valid for my participants. But what I would also add is that veiling has become an act of struggle and rejection of Soviet/secular past in case of women university students from Central Asia. Due to the secular Soviet past of their societies and families, there is a marginalization of religion and a hostile attitude to signs of piety. The women teachers of Turkish schools, for instance, are not allowed to wear a headscarf in most Central Asian countries. Being aware of these approach, the movement also puts restrictions on veiling of women university students from Central Asia residing in the Hizmet community in Turkey.

Five of my participants told me about their experiences of veiling after their arrival in Turkey. Before the arrival no one of my participants were veiled. Currently, four of my participants are veiled, two of whom unveil when they are going back to their home countries for summer or other holidays. Apart from these four participants, Karanfil had also been veiled but after going back home in her first summer holiday she unveiled. Karanfil, who identifies herself as a devoted follower of the movement and who expresses her gratitude to those who recruited her and who took care of her, narrated her story of veiling and unveiling in a very unexpected way, as a direct response to my question about whether she had any difficulties after her arrival to Turkey. I am integrating her whole story because I found it very thought-provoking. After a considerable silence following my question, Karanfil started to tell her story:

Karanfil: They call the first-year students preppy. If, I say, I had conscience a mind that I have now I would have used more opportunities, I would have used my time more efficiently. Actually we used to read a lot, a lot of books and used our time efficiently. Indeed I do not have anything to regret about but well we were coming from a communist country, we were under the pressure of Russians my family was quiet against veiling. Our ablas took a good care and I veiled but when there was a little trouble I unveiled. What I

mean is that there are women who had more difficulties than I did but they never took their veils off. This means it was not inhabited in me so I unveiled, I took my veil off quickly. And to veil consciously is much better. More precisely, I think it is not very valuable in the sight of Allah to veil, let me not say pressure, but to veil by emulating [...] I never, let me not say never, but well I am happy when I am unveiled, this is hard to say. For example, our faculty is near the Faculty of Theology and I see they are veiled, veiling is beautiful, mashallah but I never wanted to be like them. I think now how I could veil in the first year... In fact it is strange that I become such a person. One should do something consciously, consciously after inhabiting some things totally. Maybe I like the veiled, I respect the veiled women but for myself.. it never inhabited in me. If I had my current conscience at that time I would not veil, I think.

### **You say that you veiled because you emulated?**

Karanfil: It was not just emulating, it was but we were coming from the communist country, of course Allah-u Teala puts this [will] in everyone but it was more after ablas took good care of us not because of pressure. They said it is written in Nur surah Nur verse and if you do not veil now you will not veil ever and so on... actually I wanted to continue and I was inhabiting it but my family my parents were against, they were too much opposing. And now I think it is better not to veil rather than to veil and then unveil. This is my opinion. For instance, I see my friend who veiled and never unveiled. I respect them but I feel myself guilty because I veiled and then unveiled, it was very strange. because in this city pay attention to the veiledness we never walk around in a very open clothes, our sleeves are always long and so on. If only I had my current mind, it was a good attention, I don't know, it was like fear, it should be not because you are embarrassed of someone but because you want it. It should come from inside. Let me say it was not destined for me, let me not blame anyone but it has to be inhabited. It should be because of fear of Allah not out of embarrassment of someone else. I think I did not veil because I was afraid of Allah. I veiled because I was impressed by ablas, I was emulating them, maybe it was suiting me, may be because I was embarrassed of them. But if I had my current mind I would not do it for seventy-eighty percent.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> Karanfil: 1.sınıflara çöm denir saf denir böyle falan. eğer diyorum 1.sınıftaki ordaki şimdiki kafam şimdiki bilincim, bilgilerim olsaydı hani çok daha güzel değerlendirebilirdim hani şansımı, daha güzel değerlendirebilirdim vaktimi, gerçi 1.sınıfta çok kitap okuyorduk baya kitap okuyorduk zamanı tasarruflu kullanıyordum ama *bir pişman olduğum bişey yok aslında ama hani böyle biz zaten komünist bir ülkede olduğu için baya rusların baskı altında kaldığı için kapalılığa kapanmaya ailem nerdeyse hiç hoş karşılamamıştı. baya güzel bir şekilde ablalar da, güzel bir şekilde ablalar ilgilenmişlerdi hani ben de şey kapandıydım ama ben hani şey çok küçük bir zorluk çıkmasına rağmen ben işte açıldım tekrar.* hani demek istediğim hani geçmişe bakıyorum da daha zor zamanlar geçiren insanlar hiç bir zaman örtüyü kafasından çıkarıp atmamışlar. ama hani demek ki bende o şey oturmamış hani şey yapmamış hemen çıkarabildim örtüyü. hem de *bilinçli olarak kapanmak daha iyi bişey. daha doğrusu birinin baskısı demeyeyim de hani birine şey yaparak bakarak özenenerek şey*

Karanfil blames herself for veiling without acquiring the “necessary” consciousness. This is what Göle and Mahmood refer to as becoming part of self, of subject. What is important in her narrative is that she does not try to victimize herself by putting the blame on the followers but underscores the communist past a part of herself that she cannot get rid of. Additionally, she displays an awareness of the *abla*’s

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*yapmak allah katında da pek sevaplı olacağını sanmıyorum. [...] hiç bir zaman, hiç bir zaman demeyeim bana bunu söylemek çok ağır geliyor ama hani ben açık halimden çok memnunum hani ve şimdi görüyorum mesela bizim fakültemiz ilahiyatçıların ordaki fakulte. bakıyorum görüyorum hani çok güzel kapalılık kapanmışlar yakışıyor çok güzel maşallah diyim ama hiç bi zaman özenmedim onlara. ben diyorum ki 1.sınıfta nasıl yapabildim.. demiyorum. daha doğrusu böyle bir insan olmam biraz tuhaf olmuştu hani. 1.senem hazırlık okurken kapanmam daha sonra tekrar açılmam benim için baya bir tuhaf bir şey olmuştu. hani bir insan bilinçli yapması gerekiyor bir şeyi. bilinçli hani tam oturtuktan sonra yapması gerekiyor. belki hani çok sevrim çok saygı duyarım kapalı insanlara çok saygı duyarım severim ama hani kendim bilmiyorum.. bende oturmadı o şey. aaslında hani şimdiki şeyi olsaydı bilincim olsaydı belki yapmazdım. kapanmazdım diye düşünüyorum.*

#### **Kapanman birine veya bir kaç kişiye özenmekle olduğunu mu söylüyorsun?**

Karanfil: [...] Sadece özenmek değil de özenmek de vardı da biz fitrat olarak komunist bir ülkede şey yaptığımız için tabii ki de allahu teala herkesin fitratına vermiştir bu kapanma şeyini de daha çok baskı demeyim de güzel bir ilgilenme sonucu olmuştu. ablalar baya ilgilenmişti. nur süresi nur ayetiden geçiyordu hani farz falan filan böyle hani şimdi yapmazsan sonra yapmayabilirsin falan demişti... aslında ben devam ettirecektim ben bu şeyi baya bir fitrat olarak oturmuştu ama ailem annem babam özellikle annem baya bir karşıydı çok karşı oldu hatta. dedim hatta normal evde yazma dediğim bişey vardı onu takmıştım onu aldı bu şeye atmıştı yakmıştı tandıra atmıştı. ailemin mesela tepkisi çok fazlaydı. bir de hani kendim de isteyerek mi ne bilim korkuyla böyle şey arasında olduğum için pek oturtamadım. hani şimdiki açılıp, kapanıp açılmaktansa kapanmamak daha iyi diye düşünüyordum. bu benim düşüncem daha iyi. mesela şimdi bakıyorum da kapalı olan arkadaşlarım varda hiç bir zaman açmadılar başlarını falan şey yapmadılar. saygı gösteriyorum onlara ama kendimi suçlu gibi hissediyorum bir kapanıp açıldığım için çünkü baya bir değişik olmuştu. bir de burası hani daha kapalılığa çok önem veren bir şehir diye zaten açık diyerek de biz böyle açık falan gezmiyoruz hep kolumuz falan kapalıdır ama bilmiyorum. şimdiki şeyim olsaydı özenle değilde güzel bir ilgilenmeydi ne bilim korkmak mı artık çok korkmak birinden çekindiğin için değilde tamamen istediğin için olması gerekiyor insanların kapanması gerekiyor. tamamen içinden gelmesi yani. demek ki nasibim yoktu diyim de birini suçlamak gibi olmasın da hani oturması gerekiyor. tamamen birinden çekindiğin için değil de bir insandan çekindiğin için değil de allahtan korktuğu için yapması gerekiyor. ben o zaman düşünüyorum da allahtan korktuğum için ypmadım galiba. ben hani bi ablalardan şey yaptığım için onlardan etkilendiğim için belki özendiğim için belki yakıştığı için onlardan biraz çekindiğim için yapmış olabilirim. ama şimdiki şeyim olsaydı hiç bir zaman demeyiyim de 70% 80% yapmazdım.

encouragement to veil either through performative acts (wearing the headscarf in a beautiful way) or through reminding her of verses from the Quran.

Ceren who decided to wear a headscarf in the first year of her arrival experienced a similar pressure from not only the movement but also from her parents. However, from Nazlı and Ceren's narratives I observed a naturalization of this situation and some kind of resignation to veiling in Turkey and unveiling in Kyrgyzstan. She tried to be cautious and did not go into many details regarding her veiling. When I asked her whether her family made her unveil, she replied:

Ceren: Actually it is fifty fifty both my family and *Hizmet* are against. Normally, generally all women in *Hizmet* unveil in our country. When I was veiling my teachers in Kyrgyzstan told me “when you come back here you have to unveil; veil knowing this.” And I agreed.<sup>126</sup>

Nazlı also referred to the Soviet past that forces her to unveil. She, who also veils in Turkey and unveils in Kyrgyzstan, refers to her mother's “atheism” and dissatisfaction with her daughter's religious beliefs:

Nazlı: I veiled and turned myself to religion more; that is why my mother was against some things. I do not know what about your country, but my mother is grown up as an atheist and this stuff seems to her unnecessary [...] hence, my mother is not very happy about this, she says “they washed your brain”.<sup>127</sup>

Cemile is the only one among the veiled women students whom I interviewed who does not take her veil off in her home country. Her family did not oppose her decision but instead supported her. She proudly announced that even her sister veiled after she veiled. She expresses her decisiveness in continuing veiling and stresses that it is a religious obligation:

Cemile: It was banned to veil in our college, there were no veiled. Because of that I veiled the year I arrived in the preparatory year and was veiled since then. But I am veiled in the same way in my country as I am here; for example, if I wear *pardesü* (topcoat) here I wear it there as well. Nothing changes. After all my family, my sister is veiled, my brother's wife is veiled

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<sup>126</sup> Ceren: Aslında yarı yarıya ailemizde de karşılar, hizmet de var. Bizim orda genelde bütün Hizmet insanları açılıyor ya normalde. Ben kapanırken mesela Kirgizistan'daki hocalarım dediler ki bana “buraya gelince açılman gerekiyor, bunu bilerek yap” dediler. Ben de kabul ettim.

<sup>127</sup> Nazlı: Şuan kapandım ben ve dine daha çok yöneldim bu yüzden annem bazı şeylere karşıydı. ben bilmiyorum sizin ülke nasıl, benim annem ateist olarak yetişmiş ve bu tür şeyler annem için şey geliyor ne gerek var gibisinden [...] o yüzden o taraftan annem hiç mutlu değil beynini yıkamışlar senin diyo (gülüyoruz)



we are already such a family. My sister veiled after me, my brother's wife veiled after me. actually my father said "maybe you should veil after the marriage, you are still young, you did not enjoy your youth, you finished the school and veiled immediately. But you can veil after the marriage" and so on. However, in our religion there is no such a thing as you can be not veiled until the marriage. When the time comes, thus, I thought it was the right thing and I veiled.<sup>128</sup>

#### 4.7. "Nameless heroes": Leadership

Not many articles discuss the views of women affiliates on leadership and its relation to *Hizmet*. Our discussion on the leadership revolved around the question of whether they could name any woman leader in the movement. Most of my participants replied that they never thought about absence of women leaders in the movement and that they did not feel strange about the absence of women in the administrative positions in the movement. I based my arguments on my personal experience in the movement and started my conversations with the known male names in the movement. They all were familiar with these names. Nonetheless, when it came to women's names they could not name any and some were surprised at my question. When I inquired whether this situation bothers them, my participants gave very similar answers. The shared impulse is that there are such women who are very active and perform the same service as men do in the movement but the reason of their invisibility is their own willingness to be out of sight. These answers intrigued me and at the same time revealed the ambivalent conceptualization of gender norms within the movement. The women in the movement have been encouraged to receive high education and work outside their homes; however, they are not expected to become leaders in the institutions of the movement.

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<sup>128</sup> Cemile: Bizim hani *kolejdeyken kapalı olmak yasaktı* hani öyle kapalı şey yok. o yüzden mesela hazırlıkta ilk geldiğim sene kapandım ondan sonra hep kapalı. ama hani mesela memlekette de aynı şekilde mesela burda parduse giyiyorsam oraya da parduseli gidiyorum. değişen hiç bir şey yok. benim ailem zaten ablam öz ablam kaalı yengem de kapalı öyle hani zaten şeyli bir aileyiz. ablam da benden sonra yengemde benden sonra kapandı. aslında babam şöyle dedi belki evlendikten sonra kapanırsın hani daha gençliğini hiç yaşamadın gibisinden, okuldan mezun oldun direk kapandın, ama evlenince de kapanabilirsin gibisinden ama ben sonuçta bu dinimizde evlenene kadar açık olabilirsin diye bir şey yok. zamanı gelince, o yüzden en doğru olduğunu düşündüm kapanmam o yüzden kapandım.

When I inquired Karanfil about her opinion on men being the ones in the leading positions, she replied as follows:

Karanfil: I don' t know, as a woman her name can be called among the heroes on the backside. I did not learn anything from the male teachers I learned everything from female teachers. I did not learn anything from male teachers I did not even get in contact. Well, I think they themselves wanted to be nameless heroes or may be because it is more suitable according to religion. Also, I think husbands wil not give permission.<sup>129</sup>

Cemile believes that the success of male participants is based on their wives. When I asked her how she perceives the invisibility of women in the movement's higher positions she surprised me with a story about Obama and his wife. Giving an example from the context of America she tried to justify the invisibility of women. Cemile never told the name of Michelle Obama but referred just as Obama's wife:

Cemile: Well, I read it somewhere: Obama and his wife went to a cafe to a small cafe where they ca be far from others, from the press. Then a man approached Obama's wife and whispered something to her ear and told her that he will come back in a minute. After that Obama asked "who was that man?"; she answered "he is a man who was interested in me before our marriage". Then Obama told his wife "You would have such a small and cute cafe". His wife replied "If I were his wife, he would be a president of America at the moment". In fact, when you look at the important [people] their wives were really either very very patient or very smart and wise and were very supportive and directing ladies. It should not be looked just from the male's perspective. [...] A man is a half-being until he is married, he will be the whole when he marries says in our religion. In the similar way, if it is not completed it is not completed, and if you do a research you will see that a woman plays a significant role behind everything. Also, in our religion women, well woman means "to hide"; it comes from the word *katin*. In the same sense, why men accompany [women]? To protect. In the same way, a man can get bad name but at least he protects his wife; he does not put forward his wife for her doings. Also, I think there is one good thing in *Hizmet*, for example, lady means, of course, if she wishes she can become famous, but for her protection... lady is already a fragile, light and fragile being, I think if men take over it is right thing.

**I know that no matter how senior our ablas are, the whole women's side of Hizmet are very active and conduct a lot of deeds; however, it seems to me like it is not valued. I do not know, am I wrong in this sense?**

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<sup>129</sup> Karanfil: Ne bilim bir bayan olarak daha *arka sıradaki kahramanlar* diye adı geçebilir. ben de hiç bir şeyi erkek öğretmenlerden öğrenmedim hep bayan hocalardan öğretmenlerden öğrendim. hiç bir erkek öğretmenden öğrendiğim birşey yok hiç muhatabım dahi yoktu olmadı nerdeyse. hani *isimsiz kahramanlar kendileri böyle istedikleri için veya hani dinen islama uygun olmadığı için olmuş olabilir diye düşünüyorum bir de hani eşi de izin vermez heralde hani.*

Cemile: No, it is not because it is not valued. But you know, for example, at least in the current situation, it can be such conditions as it is today: everything was going very well and suddenly everything .... you know it , you are informed about it. When you are in such a situation, whose, a woman's name and surname will be pronounced, right? When it is her name [pronounced] then everything is on her. However, if her husband or her close on takes on a responsibility, he will protect her. We have such a thing in our religion: the biggest good deed is the one done secretly, the charity, the help that is done secretly. The more people know, the less is the value of the deed. Some people are very important and everyone knows them; it is not up to them, even if one of those people does not say about his deeds everyone sees it. But others, it is better to do in secret. If you give something to someone, there is a saying the left hand should not know what the right hand gave. It is beeter for us to do the things in secret.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Cemile: Şöyle ben bi yerden okumuştum obama ile eşi normal bir kafeye küçük bir kafeye gitmişler hani başkalardan press'ten uzak olalım diye. sonra obama'nın yanına işte şey obamanın eşinin yanına bir erkek gelmiş. kulağına bişey demiş, sonra bir dakika sonra gelirim demiş. sonra konuşmuşlar obama sormuş "kimmiş?" falan diye o da demiş ki "bu eskiden daha evlenmeden önce gençliğimizde bana ilgisi olan bir adamdı" diye. O zaman obama demiş ki "o zaman çok tatlı böyle küçücük bir kafen olurmuş" demiş eşine obama. ama obamanın eşi demiş ki "eğer ben onun eşi olsaydım o şuan amerika'nın başbakanı olurdu" diye. yani aslında mesela çok *büyük şeylerin aslına bakarsan eşleri gerçekten çok çok ya sabırlı ya çok akıllı zeki ve gerçekten yön destek verecek bayanlardan olmuştur*. bunu sadece bir erkek açısından bakmamak lazım. [...]dinimizde de şöyle diyor ya bir erkek evlenmediği sürece dini yarıdadır tam değildir evlendiği zaman tamamlanır diyor. bunun belki araştırırsan çok şey yaparsan altında bayanın çok payı olduğunu görürsün diye düşünüyorum. birde mesela dinimizde kadının şöyle ya kadın demek zaten saklanmak demek kadın kelimesinden geliyor. aynı şekilde mesela erkekelr niye eşlik ediyorlar çünkü korumak için. aynı şekilde *erkeğin adı çıkabilir ama sonuçta eşini korumuş oluyor herkese eşini bu yaptı diye öne çıkarmamış oluyor*. bir de mesela hizmette de bunun güzel bir yön olduğunu düşünüyorum çünkü bayan demek hani tabii ki meşhur olabilir isterse kendi adından da .. ama onun da korunması için bayan zaten narin hafif zayıf kırılabilircek bir varlık olduğu için her zaman mesela erkeğin üstlenip bunu şey yapması doğru olduğunu düşünüyorum. hani üstlenmesi ...

**ben şunu biliyorum bizim ablalar büyük olsun şey olsun bütün bayan tarafı çok aktif ve hani çok işler yapıyorlar ama bunu hiç bi şekilde hmm acaba değer görülüyormu diye düşündürüyor bu beni. Bilmiyorum, yanılıyor olabilirim bu konuda?**

Cemile: Yok değer görülmediğinden değil de daha çok hani mesela şuan hele durumlar aynı şuan ki gibi bir duruma da düşebilirler çok güzel gidiyordu ama pat diye şuan ki durumda çok .. biliyorsunuzdur haberdarsınızdır öyle bir duruma düşerse mesela orda kimin bayanın ismi soyadı geçecek demi. bayanın direk ismi geçince herşey direk ona şey yapılmış oluyor. halbuki mesela eşi yada yakını onu üstlenip de şey yaptığına onu korumuş oluyor. işte mesela dinimizde şöyle bişey var en güzel hani iman en büyük sevap gizli yapılan şeydir gizli verilen sadaka gizli edilen yardım. ne kadar çok kişi onu bilirse o kadar sevabın az olur. bazı insanlarda çok çok büyük olur ki herkes bilir onu. o

Yağmur replicates Gülen's ideas in her own words. When I started to talk about the contradiction that is involved in the position of women especially in Central Asia – a considerable efforts are paid to higher education of women but they are still exposed to discrimination – Yağmur interrupted me and continued as follows:

Yağmur: Then she has to marry, when she is going to marry when she is going to have children, these are right things. This has to happen, believe me, these are right things. In America, let alone the religion and morals, they can leave freely in a house. Then why they need marriage? Why girls dream about very beautiful weddings? Why? Because one wants to establish a beautiful family, wants to have good nice children, wants to have nice job and wife/husband. If they did not want, noone would marry in America till now. We say that it is a very free country, but why people still need to marry there? This has to happen; but it should be balanced, this is my motto... well, you have to have career you have to win your bread but when time comes you should have nice children and teach them so that they have an opportunity to make the world even better. Or let's say you did even a better thing, you should transmit your talent to your children to the new generation but you should do it in a good way not a bad way. This all happens in its time. I do not think it is [a good] thing if you make your child marry at the age of sixteen or seventeen. A child's life falls apart, he/she should learn some things, gain knowledge; this does not mean that he/she will not get married, right? These things happen with the development; it is also related to the state's development because you see here even in Istanbul people are different they are sitting freely, they live freely, they value those who are educated. Well, head a little bit to the East, there they say "oh, why should a girl get education?"<sup>131</sup>

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artık onun elinde değildir yani o artık ben bunu yaptım demiyor o demese de herkes görmüş oluyor . bunlar çok çok şleri seviyede oluyorlr. ama diğerleri mesela en güzeli saklı olladnr. hani birine bişey verirsen de bir elinn verdiği sağ elin verdiği sol elin bilmemeli diyor yani. gizli yapılması çok daha iyi bizim için.

<sup>131</sup> Yağmur: Sonra evlenecek ne zaman evlenecek ne zaman çocuk doğuracak, *bunlar doğru şeyler*. olacak bunlar, bunlar doğru şey inan ki amerikada dini geçtim ahlaki geçtim rahat yaşabiliyorlar bir evde o zaman *neden evlenme gereği duyuyolar neden kızlar evlenince çok güzel düğünüm olacak diye hasretini yaşıyorlar neden?* Çünkü insan ister güzel bir aile kurmasını ister güzel hayırlı çocuklarının olmasını ister güzel işinin eşinin olmasını ister bunların. İstemeseydi amerikada bu güne kadar kimse evlenmezdi. en böyle özgürlüğün yaşadığı ülke diyoruz oraya ama neden insanlar yine evlenme ihtiyacı duyuyorlar? Onlar olacak sadece *bazı şeyleri balanse edeceksin* bu açıkçası benim sloganım ... yani kariyer yapacaksın, kendi ekmeğini kazanacaksın ama *yeri geldiğinde çocukların olacak ki onlara güzel bir dünya öğreteceksin dünya daha da güzelleştirme imkanı sunacaksın onlara*. Yada diyelim çok güzel bişey yaptın, kendi yeteneklerini çocuklarına ve yeni nesle aktaracaksın ne bilim ama bunu iyi şekilde yapacaksın kötü şekilde değil de bence de. Onlarda olacak ama herşeyin zamanı var. ben çocuğu 16 18 yaşında evlendiren bişey olduğunu zannetmiyorum. Çocuğun hayatı

Gaye relies her assertions on the examples from the person she idealizes – her *abla*. She tells that her *abla* did not want her name to be spread out. Gaye explicates it as modesty of her *abla*:

Gaye: May be they do not want to be famous themselves. I think so because when I exemplify them by giving their names they feel uncomfortable. Yes, for instance, Gonca hoca told me that I could tell about the things we experienced without pronouncing her name. For example, we are talking on the phone and when I said “ Hocam, I am telling them about you, about what you did to us” she replied “Do not give my name, please, tell them I am your *abla*”. She told me she does not want it, may be because she does not want to be famous. Maybe she does not want to demonstrate the good deeds she did.<sup>132</sup>

Becoming a nameless hero is an important part of the movement’s discourse. It is sustained by the discourse of heroic activism and self-sacrifice. Gülen in his teachings always reminds about the loftiness of the mission and necessity of altruism to become *insan-ı kamil* and raise “a Golden Generation”.

They are these heroes who prepare our future, they are those who value every season of their lives from the very first moment of the self-consciousness, from the pinky worlds to the passionate times in the youth, from the periods when we are full with energy, power and will and maturity to the calm and stabile years of the old ages, those who measure every step, live their life in the full swing and those who know how to die in any stage of the life and dying with their own will in love and with their faces turned to the other world. Yes, these nameless heroes are souls walking on their feet, they are always running at the front but seem to be at the back, they live always in the shadow but when they die when they meet with death they are ready to face with the remarks like “he/she died very strangely”. (Gülen, 1996<sup>133</sup>)

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kararıyor, öğrensin bir şeyler bilgi edinsin o evlenmicek çocuk edinmeyecek diye anlamına gelmiyor ki? Demi? Bu gelişmekle oluyor bence bu işler birazcık devletin gelişmesi ile alakalı bu şeyler çünkü şurda bile görüyorsun demi istanbulda insanlar çok farklı rahat rahat otururlar rahat rahat yaşarlar hatta orda okuyanları daha çok benimserler. Ee biraz doğuya git burda aman kız çocuğu okur mu der?

<sup>132</sup> Gaye: *belki kendileri tanınmasını istemiyor olabilirler*. bence öyle çünkü ben mesela *isim vererek örnek verdiğimde bile kendileri rahatsız olduklarını biliyorum*. evet, mesela x hoca.hani diyebilirsiniz dedi hani benimle yaşadığın olayları anlatabilirsin de ismimi vermeden dedi. işte mesela telefonda konuşuyoruz “ya hocam anlatıyorum sizi, böyle böyle bize yaptıklarınızı” falan filan dediğimde, “benim ismimi vermeden şey yapsan” dedi. “ablam olarak anlatsan” dedi. hani “istemiyorum” dedi tanınmasını mı artık ne bilim. *belki yaptığı iyiliği ortaya dökmek istemiyodur*.

<sup>133</sup> Kendimizi ilk idrak ettiğimiz tül-pembe dünyalardan gençliğin şahlanmaya açık rengârenk âlemlerine, olgunluğun, güç, kuvvet ve irade ile serfirâz olduğu dönemlerden yaşlılığın temkinli ve istikrarlı çağlarına kadar *her faslı çok iyi değerlendiren, her*

My participants are not the only women who articulated the significance of being a nameless hero. Zeynep, a teacher in one of the movement's schools, in her interview with Elizabeth Özdalga also conveyed her wish to be a nameless hero:

Well, rather than playing an important role in history and becoming a name in the history books, I would like to have a seat with Allah in heaven. That is to say, I would rather become what they rather call a nameless hero.(Özdalga 2003: 96)

Most of my participants were content with the current positioning of women within the movement. They appreciate the movement's support in their education and self-improvement. However, when it comes to the leadership it seems like they step back and prefer not to be named. My participants referred to these women as "the heroes in the back row". One of my participants acknowledges the deeds of women participants as very valuable and claims that women participants currently conduct the most part of the service:

Karanfil: Besides, the seventy percent of Hizmet is conducted by *ablas* recently, thus, more than half. Because on the women's side, how to say it, women are more obedient more leaning than men but men can stay in Hizmet and can have a duty and those who do not have any duty they all have girlfriends but on the women's side it is not like this. They [*ablas*] are more enthusiastic more obedient, I can conclude from this, more ambitious, more obedient, more. But it should not be unfair to men as well, there are many enthusiastic men.<sup>134</sup>

However, as it is stated in her quote, along with her appreciation of women's aspirations, she describes women participants as "less rebellious" and "more obedient".

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*adımını dikkatlice atan, hayatını dolu dolu yaşayan ve ömrünün her dönemecinde ölmesini bilen, ölürken de iradesiyle, yüzü ötelere dönük ve aşk içinde ölenler, ütopyalarda anlatılanları da aşkın, yarınlarımızı hazırlayacak kahramanlar işte bunlardır. Evet, bu isimsiz kahramanlar ve kendi ayaklarıyla yürüyen bu âbide ruhlarıdır ki, hep önde koşar, arkada görünür; nesiller boyu 'yâd-ı cemil' olacak şekilde yaşar; ama ölümle buluşmayı da hep 'bir garip ölmüş diyeler' mülâhazası içinde gerçekleştirmeyi düşünürler. Gülen, F. (1996). Bir Yere Kadar Muayyeniyet. Retrieved from: <http://tr.fgulen.com/content/view/629/98/>*

<sup>134</sup> Karanfil: Zaten hizmetin son zamanda hizmetin %70ni ablalar götürüyormuş, yani yarısından fazlasını. hani çünkü nasıl diyim hani bayanlarda mesela bayanlar daha çok itaatkardır daha çok yatkındırlar. ama erkekler öyle değildir. erkekler mesela hizmette kalabilir vazifeli de olabilir hizmette kalan tüm erkeklerin vazifeli görevleri olmadıkların hepsini kız arkadaşı vardır. ama bayan kısmında bayan bir kitlede öyle değildir... daha ihlaslılar daha itaatkarlar ordan çıkarabilirim bu sonucu. daha ihlaslı daha itaatkar daha şeydirler. ama erkeklerin onların da hakkını yememek lazım onlardan da vardır bir sürü ihlaslı olan.

Other common threads in my participants' stories are that, first of all, men serve the movement in a better way and second, that they are more suitable for the leading positions than women. Berna Turam asserts that the male followers of the movement typically underestimate the female followers' activities for the movement and regard them as pleasurable pastime:

My informal group interviews and participant observations among several male followers showed that they prefer to regard women's *Risale* readings as a sort of leisure activity along with tea, cookies and pastry as opposed to the men's organizational activities with substantial return. In general, women's religious and spiritual activities were underrepresented in the movement. The Gülen school of thought was developed exclusively by the male individuals, particularly the circle around Fethullah Gülen and his best friends. As they do not collaborate with female followers in the private sphere, there are not opportunities to exchange ideas between the sexes. (Turam 2007: 122)

In agreement with Turam, I suggest that female followers also underestimated their activities and glorified the deeds of male followers. The media outlets of Hizmet usually depict men as the ones who open schools and construct other educational institutions. Women who participate in local networks and collect donations usually are not illustrated in this picture. While most of the Central Asian students knew which *abi* initiated *Hizmet* in their country, they could not and did not mention any *abla* who might have supported this initiation. Neglecting women's activities also contribute and is supported by the traditional roles of mother and wife. The woman who is active in the movement is thought to be influential through her connection with her husband. From my personal experience in the movement, I can say that usually the *abla* responsible for a women's part in a certain country or city is the wife of the *abi* who is responsible for that activities of that city or country as well. It is also not a coincidence that there is such a network of women who are housewives and are called as *ev anneleri*. These women contribute to the movement by supplying the student housings with food and necessary provisions. However, their activities and contributions are also not discussed much as well as their experiences.

My research participants ascribed leadership to men and believed that male followers have been more active and important in terms of *Hizmet*. The following three reflections demonstrate how these young women glorified the deeds of the male participants and thus created hierarchy in performing *Hizmet*:

**Well then, you are more familiar with the women's side of Hizmet, did you ever say that the men's side is more free? Or did you ever compare?**

Ceren: Actually I compared but not in the sense of freedom, I think men are more connected to [*Hizmet*] than women.

**You think they are more connected to *Hizmet*?**

Ceren: Yes

**In what sense are they connected?**

Ceren: Well, I think when they are given a duty they fulfill it completely. Of course they are more free than us, they can go out whenever they want and they can come back whenever they want but I do not think they disregard their duties because they have this nature they are not bored doing the same things regularly but women are not like these. Women always want changes. Well, when my brother was staying in Hizmet and I compared. Frankly speaking, they are much better in what they do.<sup>135</sup>

Gaye: Men are doing more long-lasting things [...] opening a school, I never heard a woman opening a school [...]. they are always by their husbands.. I, well, there is a documentary about a teacher who went to Africa and said “bury me where I die” and he was buried in the school yard. His wife still continues his profession. This abla's name is relevant, but maybe she became famous because her husband was famous<sup>136</sup>.

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<sup>135</sup> **peki sonuçta sen daha çok hizmetin bayan tarafını tanıyosun, hiç erkek tarafında böyle daha serbestler dediğin oldu mu? veya işte karşılaştırdın mı hiç?**

Ceren: ya karşılaştırdığım oldu ama şey değil serbestlik konusunda değil sadece erkekler daha çok bağlı olduğunu düşünüyorum bayanlara göre hizmete daha fazla bağlı olduklarını mı düşünüyorsunuz?

Ceren: evet

**ne konuda bağlı olduklarını düşünüyorsunuz?**

Ceren: ya mesela onlara *bi görev verildiği zaman tam yaptıklarını düşünüyorum*. tabii erkekler biraz daha rahat bize göre hani istediği zaman dışarıya çıkıp istediği zaman gezebilirler ama görevlerini de hiç ihmal ettiklerini sanmıyorum çünkü onların şey yapısı varya aynı şeyi düzenli olarak yapmaktan canları sıkılmaz derler ya erkeklerin bayanlar öyle değil işte bayanlar sürekli değişiklik ister. ama öyle hani kardeşim cemaatte kaldığı sırada biraz karşılaştırmıştım ve gerçekten bize göre onların daha iyi yaptıklarını düşündüm.

<sup>136</sup> Gaye: Erkekler daha çok gözde kalıcı bir şey yapıyor ya [...] bir okul açması, bir bayan okul açtığını ben duymadım[...] hep eşlerinin yanındalar... ben hani şu afrikada hoca olarak gidiyor “ben nerde ölsem oraya mezarımı oraya koyun” diyor ve o okulun bahçesinde kalıyor ve eşi hala onun mesleğini devam ediyordu orda onunla alakalı bir belgesel var. mesela o ablanın ismi alakalı. o tek şuan aklıma geldi. o da belki onun eşi olduğu için tanındı.



Karanfil: Normally leadership is not for women but is more suitable to men; thus, the senior abis in Hizmet are and should be the responsible for states not women. Maybe because of this I think. We barely know any woman leaders, Margaret Thatcher or what is the name of a Ukrainian Prime Minister, there are very few except these women. All of them are men. Of course, let's not call it leadership, taking a bigger responsibility are men's because they are stronger. A woman has to look after her child, she has a family, she has a husband.<sup>137</sup>

As it turns out in the accounts of these young women, leadership is associated with male participants not with female affiliates. In the current literature on women participants, the scholars have generally interviewed women who are working in the movement's schools or other institutions for several years or are married to someone from the movement and have children. I was surprised at the similarity of the narratives and reflections between my participants and these women because most of them reside outside Turkey and are of elder generation than my interviewees. Özge in Rausch's (2012) research findings resonates closely with mine:

Men are more visible in administrative functions for two reasons. Firstly, men are better than women in leadership. Secondly, they advance themselves more in academic pursuits. Some ladies coordinate events, and they serve as principals and administrators in schools. But unfortunately their number is not that high. Nobody is preventing them. But women have more responsibilities in caring for the home and children. They cannot advance themselves as much, if they choose to be a mother. Being a mother is more important job. They cannot leave their kids behind for the sake of being a leader (Rausch 2012: 152).

Anna J. Stephenson also asserts that men have been regarded as more suitable to become leaders:

Men are considered intrinsically suited to leadership. The ideal for men in Turkey and the movement often remains as the professionally employed financial providers and keepers of the worldview who display authority, intelligence, and less emotional personalities. Women in the Gülen movement as well as secularist (non-religious or privately religious) women in Turkey have experienced the following limits (Durakbasa, A. & Ilyasoglu, A., 2001; Turam, 2000; White, 2002). (Stephenson 2006: 3)

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<sup>137</sup> Karanfil: Normalde hani liderlik daha çok bayana değil de erkeğe baya bir hitap eden birşey olduğu için daha üst seviyedeki abiler de bir ülke sorumlusu abiler bir bayan değil erkek olması gerekiyordur. belki ondandır diye düşünüyorum. hep liderlik şeyinde neredeyse çok az tanıyoruz bir bayan margaret thatcher yada neydi ukraina'nın şeyi varya başbakanı dışında çok az sayıda bir bayan lideri vardır. onun dışında hepsi erkek. Tabii ki de bu liderlik demeyelim de daha böyle yüksek bir vazife olduğu için erkekler daha dayanıklı. Bir bayan çocuğuna bakması gerekiyor bir ailesi vardır, kocası vardır.

However, my participants would disagree with Stephenson because according to them, men all over the world, not just in Turkey, take on higher duties. They recognize this notion as a universal conduct. The women who have spent many years in the movement assert that the movement does not deprive them of pursuing responsibility in higher positions.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I argue that the inclusion of women in the movement has been used to argue for a clear break from the “Western” prejudice that exhibits Islam as a source of oppression for women. Although this may seem contradictory, this can also be interpreted as an attempt of the community to get approval and recognition from the “West”. Based on my research, I suggest that the young women find the space for self-realization in the *Hizmet* community in Turkey. This self-cultivation is not deprived of the traditional mother and wife roles. My participants’ narratives on gender roles largely overlap with the movement’s discourse and Gülen’s ideas. The essentialist approach of Gülen that draws an image of women as fragile, tender and compassionate beings positions men on the opposite site as physically strong and more pragmatic. Although my interviewees universalized women’s oppression and demonstrated lack of interest in problematizing gender segregation and the leadership of men, it would be inaccurate to interpret this as total subordination. Inhabiting proper Muslim life is a different mode of agency that my participants conduct through performing veiling and religious acts.

## CONCLUSION

The educational initiations of the global Gülen community in Central Asia have expanded since the early 1990s. The educational deterioration is only one among many social and political crises that the post-Soviet Central Asian countries have gone through. Poor quality of the high educational institutions, the rising corruption and high competition in the educational sphere are the main objectives for migration of the students from Central Asia to get university education abroad. Fethullah Gülen motivated his disciples to fill this gap in education in Central Asia by recalling the “common” past and “similar” cultures and underlying the importance of economic and cultural investment for Turkey in this region for its future potentials in the global arena. Tens of Turkish schools, sponsored by Turkish businesspeople, have been established in the region. The success of the alumnis of Turkish schools in the international contests and getting scholarships from famous universities abroad created a positive image about these schools in the region. Moreover, this image was one of the factors in a mass student migration to Turkey. Drawing from my personal experience of migration to Turkey through the affiliation with the Gülen community and academic interest in Women and Gender studies, I researched the gendered aspects of this specific migration and affiliation.

My critical approach to the gendered discrimination within and the gendered organization of the community was one of the main reasons for distancing myself from the community. The sex-segregated environment and the invisibility of women affiliates in the leading positions of the community have already been subjects for criticism in the

academic literature on the Gülen movement (Turam 2007, Özdalga 2003). However, the experiences and daily lives of the women students' in the community remains understudied as the shifting boundaries and closeness of the community as well as the gender segregation make the ethnographic work more difficult for the outsiders. Although the events of December 17, 2013 made my access to the participants more difficult, my former affiliation in the community provided me with the opportunity to conduct an ethnographic research in the *abla* houses.

The initial questions that I approached my participants were more general questions about their migration, affiliation and education. All of my participants narrated that they were unfamiliar with the community namely as the Gülen community until their arrival in Turkey. This shared account intrigued my questions on the perceptions of the students before and after their arrival. I suggest here that these perceptions are not only shaped by the community but also are gendered discourses constructed within the community. Underlying "the safety" of migrating to Turkey as a woman university student, my participants endorsed my initial assumption on the gendered aspects of the migration.

Moreover, another common narrative among women students from Central Asia about the quick adaptation and integration made me explore deeper the nature of relationships within the movement. Conceptualizing transnational relationships within the community, I discovered the centrality of *muhacir-ensar* relationship in establishing stronger ties with the international students. Analyzing this relationship and its significant role in fostering the migration of the women university students from Central Asia to Turkey with a gender lens, I suggest that the conceptualization of the community as a religious fraternity, hence "brotherhood", is limited and gendered. Thus, my research is informed by a critical gender analysis that reveals the constructed gendered identities and relationships in the homosocial sites of the communal living in the Hizmet housings.

In the second chapter, I explored the modernist discourse in the students' perceptions of Turkey primarily shaped by their acquaintance with the *Hizmet* community before their arrival and the transformations of this image after their arrival. Turkish schools in the region are not known as the educational institutions connected with the Gülen community; they are illustrated as private international schools

sponsored by Turkish businesspeople providing alternative to the state education. The teachers of the schools – the affiliates of the community – do not represent themselves as the followers of Gülen. As many of my participants underlined, the success of the alumnis of the schools and the warm informal relationships they built increased their desire to study in Turkey. I suggest that this desire was also informed by a modernist discourse integrated in the image of Turkey.

First, adopting Meltem Ahıska's conceptualization of "belated modernity" (2003) I scrutinized the national identifications of the students and their perceptions of Turkey as a "model" to their countries. This discourse replicates the modernist outlook by taking a form of an occidentalist desire and fantasy. This discourse is not independent from the movement's discourse of modernity and positioning of the "West" and "East". This modernist perspective emerged in the context of comparing the education systems of their home country, Turkey and other countries where the mass educational migration took place in the last decade. The urgencies of the present day – in this context a serious educational deterioration in Central Asian countries – are concealed by the concerns of "being late", of "missing the train of civilization". Furthermore, I recognized that there is no single "West" in the imaginaries of these students. In this imaginary in the hierarchical position of the "West"s Turkey appears in the first place leaving Russia, China and US behind. The point where they discussed the difference between these countries was the choice of country for university education. Interestingly, the reason for the choice of Turkey was not only because it was "modern" but also because it was "safe".

Further in the second chapter I traced this notion of "safety" and "protection" that has been continuously underlined in the narratives of my participants. I underscore the gender implications underlying in the discourse of "safety" and "protection". In this section I reconsidered my argument that the image of Turkey and the movement are interchangeable in the narratives of my participants. Because, the discourse of safety and protection ruptures after the arrival of the students to Turkey and the image of the movement diverges from the image of Turkey. While the *Hizmet* community remains always "safe", Turkey becomes less "safe". Interestingly, this rupture occurs through the image of woman. My participants expressed their anxiety and discomfort at the sight of women smoking on the streets. This "shocking" image not only divides the holistic imaginary of Turkey but also creates different "others" in their perceptions. Women

smoking cigarettes on the streets represents the whole “other” world outside the boundaries of student housing of the *Hizmet* movement.

I open up a discussion of the relationships within the boundaries of the student housing in the third chapter of the thesis. In the literature on the community the relationships within the community are conceptualized as religious fraternity, directly associated with brotherhood, that conceals other relationships and ignores the presence of women in this framework. The kin terms like *abla* or *abi* do not only play significant role in the process of conversion but also reveal the ambiguity of the relationships in the community. While on the one hand these relationships are friendly and close relationships, on the other hand, there is also distance that the senior members put between them and the other residents of the housing. (Vicini 2013) Another form of relationship that I conceptualized is *muhacir-ensar* relationship that is central in my case.

In this chapter I suggested that the *Hizmet* housing is one of the central sites where fictive kin relations – here it is *muhacir-ensar* relationships – are established and consolidated and that the gender segregated, homosocial characteristic of this site of communal living and interaction underlines the significance of gender in our analysis of the *Hizmet* community. In the case of the students from the Central Asia, the kin relationships are sustained through the common historical and cultural past of Turkic cultures and the Islam religion. Gülen in his sermons puts an emphasis on revitalizing the *muhacir-ensar* relationship as a model relationship. Becoming one family and living together is one of the features of this relationship.

Moreover, borrowing the term homosociality, I explored the nature of these relationships that not only develop within the female student housing of the movement but also crosses the boundaries of it. The shared narrative among the women students from Central Asia is their quick adaptation to the environment of the movement. Digging into this discourse I realized that the familial terms like “*abla*” or “*ev annesi*” lessens the anxiety of the newly arrived students and make them feel integrated into the big family of the *Hizmet* movement. The over-protective (and at the same time “gendered”) attitude of the *ablas* in the movement make the students feel “home”. On the other side, these kin relationships do not only serve as a medium for adaptation but also attempt to conceal the hierarchical structure of the movement. The *Hizmet* housing

is not only a site for socializing and networking but also is a learning place, a place for becoming mature. The narratives of my participants regarding the rules and regulations within the movement, specifically within the boundaries of the housing, reveal the hierarchical structure of the movement.

In the last chapter, I focused on the perception of gender and gender inequalities in everyday practices of women university students in the community. As I already stated, the women affiliates' mobilization has been used by the community to present itself as a liberal movement. However, this should not be understood as a total subordination of women to the male-oriented structure of the community. Borrowing Mahmood's theory of "different modalities of agency" (2011), I argue that the community served as one of the media for self-empowerment and self-realization of women. My participants recognized the state's discriminatory practices more easily than the gendered attitude of their families and the movement. I argue that the relationships constructed in the movement and the emotional attachment to the movement conceals and naturalized the gendered nature of the movement.

I mainly focused on the issues of leadership and how my participants perceive male leadership in the movement in this chapter. The common narrative of my participants regarding the "nameless heroes" exposes how my participants ascribed leadership to men and believed that male affiliates are more active and thus, more beneficial to the community. They glorified the deeds of male followers and strengthened the gendered inequalities within the community. Also, women students legitimize the gendered attitude of the movement by rearticulating the discourse of the movement and teachings of Gülen regarding women. My participants universalize women's subordination by arguing that women are second class citizens everywhere.

Throughout this research I aimed to reveal the gendered experiences of women university students from Central Asia in the *Hizmet* community in Turkey. Tracing the migration path, the experiences of education and affiliation, I focused on the relationships and daily lives of my participants through a gender lens. Scrutinizing the mobilization of women in the gendered community, I realized the importance of interpersonal relationships and socialization as well as discourse of one big family.

My study aims to contribute to the literature on gender and the Gülen community as well as to the literature on mobilization of women in the religious and

political movements in Turkey. The gendered discourse of safety entangled in the process of migration of women university students from Central Asia and supported by the *muhacir-ensar* relationship that developed further in the *Hizmet* housing adds to the literature of migration of women students. I hope this research will open up ways to further explore the experiences of women in other religious movements in Turkey as well as to discover the experiences of gender and sexuality of individuals affiliated with the Gülen community.



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